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Adventure

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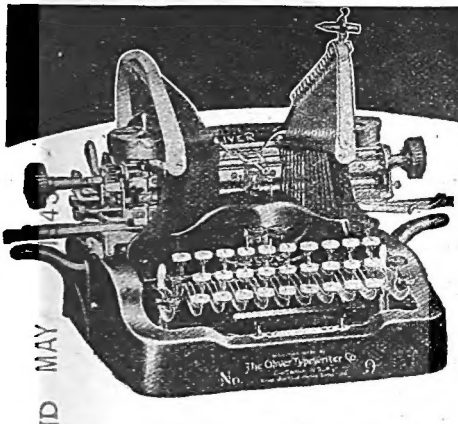

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Feb. 18th, 1920

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Vol. 24 No. 4
Serial No. 148

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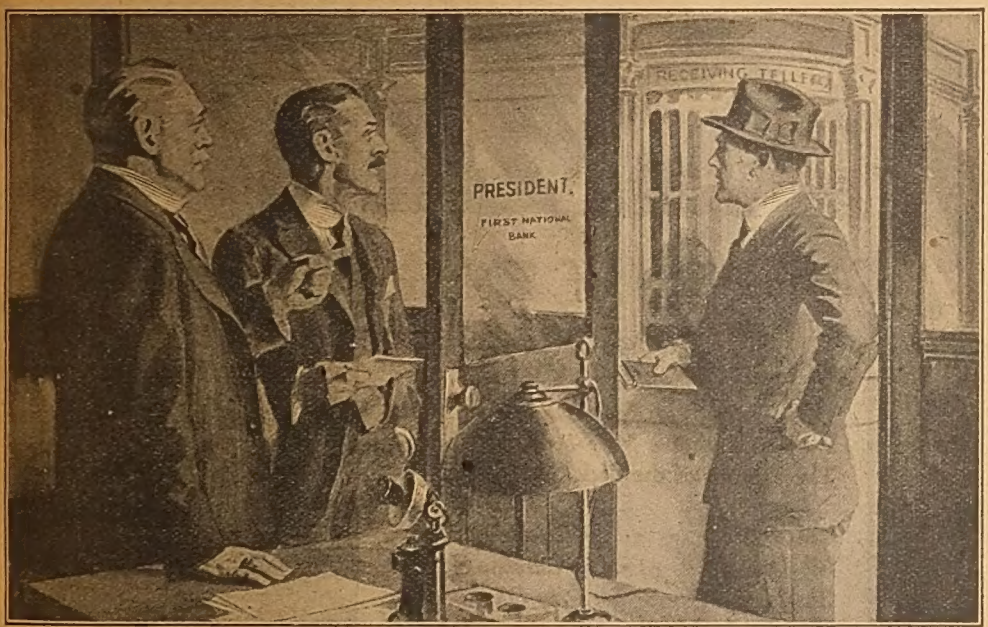

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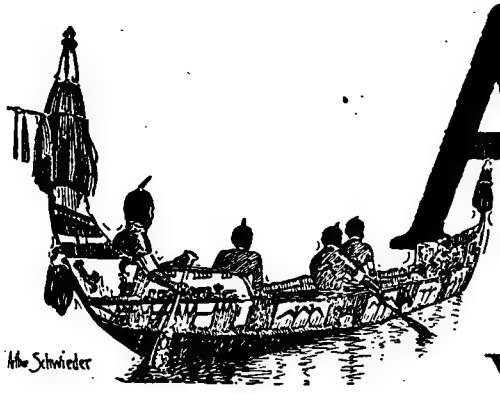

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Headings . . . . . **Arthur Schwieder**

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SEATED in a restaurant in New York City, *Don Everhard* suddenly finds himself involved in an insidious plot, the entanglements of which are stretched halfway across the continent and implicate the destinies of many prominent men, including the governor of a State. "Rich Crooks," a complete novelette by Gordon Young, is among the contents of the First March *Adventure*.

IN THE midst of the Indian Ocean they find a steamer, richly laden—and every human being aboard is dead. Strange disappearances and garbled songs from unknown sources precede the death of an entire watch in the stokehole. "The Singing Monkey," a complete novelette by Charles Beadle, in the next issue.

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Adventure
Vol-24 No-4
February 16, 1920

The HAND of the MAHDI

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by Farnham Bishop
and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Authors of "The Iron Arm," "The Pass of Blood," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF IAN DHU

A TRUMPET shattered the drowsy afternoon silence. It pealed thrice; then a brazen bell clanged with discordant fury. Instantly the courtyard of Rocca Forte castle burst into life. Mail clanked and jingled, shields clattered on armored shoulders, iron-shod feet pounded in noisy haste over the flagstones.

A dozen light-armed archers dashed out under the massive gateway, over the lowered drawbridge and round the first turn of the steep, zigzag ramp on their way down to the stone barbican which sat grimly athwart the road to Palermo. Twoscore men-at-arms in gleaming chain mail lined the battlements of the bailey, or walled outer court, within which the hall and three sides of the towering, square keep formed a fortress within a fortress. The fourth side of the keep rose strong and menacing from the edge of a sheer limestone cliff which overhung the blue harbor and bluer sea far below.

"Ha! Raoul! Denis!"

A huge, broad-faced captain burst from the arched gate of the hall, his shield ringing on his back as he ran and punctuating his shouts with metallic clangor.

"To the keep and the west battlements!" he cried to his two lieutentants. "The Moors! A sea attack!"

Denis, lithe and fierce-faced, ran straight

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for the barbican to recall the archers who had rushed to their posts there in anticipation of assault from the landward and least protected side of the castle, while Raoul led the spearmen to the sea-wall. As the first man reached the angle formed by the north and west walls, he cried aloud, pointing out to sea with his lance. Eagerly his comrades peered through loopholes and machicolations.

"To work, you knaves!" barked the broad-faced captain as he came up with a throng of archers and more men-at-arms.

Leaning their spears against the battlements, some of the warriors sprang to a pile of rounded stones as thick as a man's body. These they rolled to the base of the nearest catapult, and, two men lifting a single stone, they placed it in the sling after others had wound the windlass till the arm of the engine was well back. Other details kindled fires of dry timbers already placed on the stone platform under caldrons full of pitch or chunks of lead. Smoke rising from the keep above them showed that there, also, lead and pitch were being melted to withstand attack. The acrid fumes drifted over the edge of the cliff and eddied lazily in the slight breeze.

"Not enough lead, Jaufré. You, Renault, fetch more from the armory!"

It was a woman's voice, deep and rich, but commanding. The broad-faced captain turned about and stood at attention while the man Renault sped on his errand. Jaufré flushed like a small boy caught at mischief.

"We have been at peace six months, Lady Fulvia, and I did not think——"

"If you would think once in a while you would be perfect," the lady caught him up, "and then God would take you from this evil world. Here, Philippe, let me have your place! I have not yet seen our foes."

Elbowing the spearman, Philippe, from his place in the angle of the wall, she looked through the loophole.

"Moors truly," she commented. "The standard of their false prophet flies at every masthead. But what, in the Virgin's name, is the craft they pursue? And why did those fools on the keep give the alarm when the pagans are not assailing us, but the ship yonder? Come hither, Jaufré, and tell me!"

Jaufré hastened to his lady's side.

"It is a Christian ship they follow," the captain declared after a moment's scrutiny.

"Blockhead! I can see that. The cross at her masthead is proof enough. But, beyond being Christian, what is she? Such a craft never passed my shores before. Look at her bluff bows, her single mast, the tub-waist of her! Ha! She makes for the harbor!"

Before Jaufré could answer, the Lady Fulvia was half-way to the keep, draperies swirling and tawny hair flying behind her as she ran. As she reached the massive tower she turned from the parapet down a little flight of stone stairs, turned again and entered a little sally-port set in the stone of the keep itself. This door gave access to the tower at the turn of a winding staircase which rose steeply from the hall to the top of the keep. There, presently, Fulvia appeared upon the flagged platform which was walled with crenelated ramparts and alive with soldiery.

From this vantage-point she could look down the harbor, which was partly hidden from the ramparts of the bailey by the angle of the tower. On the one hand she could see the Mediterranean stretching away to the west and north, on the other she could look down on two of her own war-galleys lying at anchor before the busy fishing-town across the harbor, where her tenants, the Moslem fisher-folk, dwelt in perfect friendship with their Christian mistress and fellow countrymen. In Sicily the twelfth century was as tolerant toward alien faiths as it was fanatical in the rest of Europe.

A large, broad-beamed galley, its one square sail fluttering slowly to the deck, was heading in for the harbor-mouth as fast as the arms of forty sturdy oarsmen could urge her. She was as the Lady Fulvia had described her to Jaufré: big, obviously sea-worthy but not over-swift and utterly unlike anything that Rocca Forte had ever seen before. The cross flew from her masthead, a not unusual thing for the period. The sun picked out the armor of her crew dazzlingly.

Fulvia frowned and, going to the north wall, signaled to Jaufré. In a few moments the captain was beside her.

"Look!" she cried to him. "Those Moors! They too are making in! They gain! Their decks are black with men! They will catch the Christian as he tries to enter the harbor, for the chain is down!"

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Her blue eyes were sparkling with excitement; her smooth dark cheeks were glowing.

"Let the chain stay down," Jaufré advised cautiously. "It may be a trick to get in and storm the castle."

They watched the chase eagerly. Behind the strange ship, which seemed Christian, followed six large galleys, each with two banks of oars. The lateen sails were still spread to catch the faint breeze, while the rowers redoubled their efforts and the six closed in upon their quarry till but half a mile separated her from the foremost. The North African type of the pursuers was now unmistakable.

"Berbers," Jaufré commented, "enemies of God and man. The saints know what the other is, but I would wager it is a clever trick of those Moslem dogs to beguile us."

Fulvia pointed down to her own two galleys in the harbor. Their decks were full, their oars were manned, the anchors weighed.

As the girl looked, the last boat-load of fighting fishermen drew alongside the nearer Rocca galley. Her Saracen subjects had responded well to her summons. At the first warning blast of the trumpet from the tower they had launched their boats and were now weaponed and aboard. If the Berbers attacked, the chain across the harbor-mouth, stretching from the base of the tower to the opposite shore, would keep them out while her catapults poured stones upon them and her archers kept the walls.

If they landed and could raise the chain, her two galleys would take up the defense. The landing was poor and might easily be defended, so that the greater numbers of the Berbers were offset by Rocca Forte's advantage in position. Even if the Berber fleet forced the harbor, the castle could easily hold out till help came from King Roger in Palermo or from some of Fulvia's Norman neighbors. The Normans were masters in Sicily and ruled it firmly; the Mohammedans, who formed so large a portion of the population, were loyal, even against their fellow Moslems of the African coast.

Fulvia pointed again to the closely pressed galley of strange design. "She is Christian!" she cried. "It is no trick! I remember how my father, when I was a child, told me tales of grandsire's people far in the North and described their ships. They were like that!"

FULVIA'S father, "Arnulfo of the Iron Arm," had been a Norman of the Normans, but he was nearer to the Norse strain in that race than the other conquerors of Sicily. They had come hither from France through Italy. His grandfather, one of the Vikings who colonized Normandy from Scandinavia, had not clung like the others to his French domains, but had brought his French wife and his Norse crew into the Mediterranean on an independent cruise. The old adventurer, Arinulf, or the "The Eagle-Wolf," had discovered, conquered and held the fine harbor and commanding crag of Rocca Forte. His son likewise held it against all the assaults of the Moslems who then enslaved Sicily.

During the time of this second chief of the line, the great Norman invasion of Robert Guiscard and Count Roger, his brother, had swept the island, freed the Christians of a dozen races from Moorish thrall and subjugated the Moslems. So the Eagle-Wolf's son had become a Norman among Normans, being of the same mixed Norse and Frankish blood, though of earlier vintage. His son, Arnulfo, served King Roger as the father had served Count Roger. He was the King's champion in 1130 when Roger was crowned King of the Two Sicilies at Palermo.

With Roger's approval, he married Roma Marcellini, the lovely daughter of the proudest family in Rome. Fulvia was their daughter and she combined the blue eyes, tawny hair and fiery spirit of her Norse great-grandsire with the rare beauty and grace of her southern mother. Moreover, Arnulfo, who had himself inherited with his Norse blood the wild legends of his people, passed them on to his daughter, distorted through generations away from their native soil, but vivid and fascinating to the girl.

Count Arnulfo was dead, slain by outlaws who coveted his rich estate and powerful castle of Rocca Forte as well as the loveliness of his daughter. A year since he had been ambushed and slain. Fulvia, through cunning and courage greater even than that of her Norman stock, had outwitted, captured and hanged his murderers.

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King Roger, who had wished to marry her to some powerful baron among his subjects in order that Rocca Forte, the key to the casket which held Palermo, the jewel of Sicily, might be preserved safe from the hands of his foes, was compelled to recognize her worthiness to rule as her father's successor. She had shown that she could make her hands guard her head, and, against his will, King Roger consented to allow her to remain unmarried as long as she chose and confirmed her as countess in her own right.

Now, in the strange outlines of the pursued galley, the Countess Fulvia recognized a likeness to the Viking craft of her Northern forefathers, as Arnulfo had described them, and she was convinced that the galley's crew were not only Christians, but people of that far-off north from which her ancestor, the Eagle-Wolf, had come. The thought set her heart throbbing with excitement and the joy of discovery. She turned to Jaufré, her red lips parted, her bosom heaving.

"Give orders to lower the chain!" she commanded.

But Jaufré was not convinced. He knew nothing of that northern world which lay far beyond the basin of the Mediterranean. Norman by blood, he had been born in Sicily and had never been off the island. Berbers were capable of any deceit, any disguise. That he knew and that sufficed his brave, simple soul. He hesitated.

Fulvia caught his arm.

"Look you!" she cried, almost dancing with impatience. "They are Christians, I tell you! They are close enough for your eyes to see and your stupid brain to understand! Look at their mail! Look at the crosses on their breasts! Will you let them be slaughtered by infidels?"

"We are at peace with the infidels," Jaufré declared imperturbably. "We rule over infidels here at home. We have no quarrel with any but Berbers, and just now we are at peace with them. Why interfere in what concerns us not?"

"Go!" Fulvia ordered.

Her tone left no room for argument. Swiftly Jaufré descended the stair. From her vantage-point, Fulvia watched for the first convulsion of the chain which would indicate that the windlass in the base of the tower was turning in response to her order. At last she saw it quiver, saw, too, Jaufré's head thrust out of the lowest arrow-slot in the tower and heard his great voice bellowing orders to the Norman captains of her war-galleys which had crossed the harbor and lay at the tower-foot. As the chain began to sink, to make passage through the mouth of the harbor for the hard-pressed fugitive, her own ships crept slightly forward, their oars moving gently in unison.

"Now!" said Fulvia between her teeth, as if the imperiled Christians in the laboring galley could hear and understand her. But they were already urging their craft straight for the chain, which sank gradually before them. In a moment their keel would shoot safely over it, the chain would rise again and the Berber galleys be baffled.

The six ships of the Moslems were closer now, so close that the arrows, discharged in clouds from their forecastles, struck the water but a spear-length behind the quarry's stern. Savage yells almost drowned the high throb of kettle-drums, the clash of cymbals and the blare of the pagan trumpets. Fulvia could see the officers leaning over the rail—sinewy, bearded North Africans, their faces convulsed with the blood-thirst of the fanatic. Their double tiers of oars drove the galleys on faster and faster; their decks were alive with swarming swordsmen and flashing with bare weapons.

Then something went wrong. There was a loud snap, an angry metallic whir, and the chain, which had already sunk to the water-level even a few rods from shore, whipped up suddenly taut and quivering. Even in mid-channel it was out of water, but the Christian vessel, driven straight on, dashed in close to the castle and bore down on the chain as if none on board had seen it. In mid-stroke it caught the vessel round the bows and brought her up short in a welter of splashing foam. She lay there prisoned, held by the vast fetter just below her figure-head—a gigantic, rudely carved, squatting cat.

THE Berbers raised a howl of triumph, crying aloud to Allah. Clearly Fulvia's voice rang out in an order to her men-at-arms:

"Make ready the catapults! Aim just abaft their foremasts! Shoot straight, for

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there will be time for but one discharge before they close and cut her out before our eyes."

It was so. The Christian vessel lay almost at the castle's foot, a scant bow-shot from Fulvia's own galleys. Had not the windlass jammed, the vessel would have dashed over the chain as the galleys advanced to meet her. But now she was held from them and they from her, while the Berber arrows beat upon her high-walled poop. In a moment they would close, while the galleys of Rocca Forte stood by, powerless to pass the chain. Fulvia looked down at the impending tragedy with horror in her eyes.

Suddenly a figure, tall and sturdy, ran forward over the Christian's deck and stood at the very base of the figurehead. Placing one foot firmly on the rail, he swept from a scabbard that dangled over his shoulder from head to heel, an enormous sword, as long as a man and fully three inches wide at the guard. Lightly he raised the tremendous blade with both hands, heaved it up till the pommel was back of his head, and brought it down in a flashing arc. With a ringing click and a hissing whir, the chain parted and flew to both sides. At once the oars chopped into the water and the galley shot in through the harbor's mouth.

Fulvia heard the wonder-struck exclamations of her men-at-arms as if she had dreamed them. Her eyes fixed on the scene below, she saw her own crews brandish their simitars and bend their bows. She saw, too, the wild onward rush of the six Berber galleys, their sides black with bearded Moslems waiting the order to board. Straight in after their victim they dashed, their galley-slaves lashing the water white with the frenzy of their strokes. As they drew within range, Fulvia cried in a strange, high voice—

"Loose!"

Six catapults drove their huge missiles hurtling through the air; lighter engines between them shot heavy javelins, while the archers on the battlements sent arrows at the crowded pagan decks as fast as they could draw and release the strings. Two of the great stones plunged into the waists of two Moslem ships, smashed men into pulp, tore through benches, ribs and bottom planking. Such men as lived threw themselves into the sea with fearful cries, but only a few swam to the safety of another galley. The stricken ships went down almost at once, and their suction drew shoals of the swimmers after them. As they struggled, others were picked off by the archers on the castle walls.

A third stone smashed the port oars of another Berber, so that the ship was helpless to maneuver. Though the starboard sweeps were intact, chained galley-slaves can not be shifted in the heat of action. But her crew kept up a steady arrow-storm against the high sides of the Christian, now coming about to meet her stricken pursuers.

A long, low Berber closed with her, bow to stern, and the Moslem crew swarmed gallantly over the Christian's rail. The garrison of the castle now turned their attention to the two Berber galleys which had brought up the rear. The stones aimed at them had fallen short, and the galleys made for the port side of their lone enemy just as she was boarded to starboard by their consort.

But, before the two could lay her aboard, Fulvia's galleys thrust themselves skilfully between. Now began a fearful fight between Moslem and Moslem. The faithful Sicilian Arabs knew the fanatical Berbers would show no mercy to any of their own faith who fought beneath Christian banners, and the assailants, maddened by such desperate resistance where they had looked for an easy victory over a single foe, flung themselves furiously upon the spears and simitars of the Rocca Forte fishermen.

As soon as the Berber crew showed their heads above the rail of the strange ship, a flashing as of tongues of fire ran all along her bulwark. The garrison of the castle cried aloud in wonder, for the flashes came from twoscore blades like that with which the Christian captain had hewn asunder the mighty chain with its twelve-inch links. The six-foot swords struck almost as one; the Berbers dropped back upon their own lower craft, some headless, some armless, some cut in two pieces at the waist. Such strokes had never before been seen in Sicily.

A wailing rose from the wounded; but the swarming Moslems who were still unhurt never flinched. Like a pack of wolves they boarded, as their shipmates had done, waving their simitars and guarding their

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turbaned heads with round shields. This time fully sixscore launched themselves at the Christian's side. Half rolled back cut to pieces, but the rest gained the deck.

Then, before the eyes of the men and the woman on the castle walls, began a mêlée horrible to see. The mail-clad Christians were drawn up in two detachments: One, of nearly eighty men, formed a double line from poop to forecastle, the rear-rank men covering the intervals between those in the front rank; the other detachment, twenty strong, were held in reserve to port, both to balance the ship and replace those who fell. All were big men, well made and mightily muscled, and all bore huge two-handed swords and wore little, round shields strapped at the elbow. There was just room between the strangers for their long blades to play.

Before and between them crowded the Berbers, outnumbered now, but more agile than their heavy opponents, and armed with short, crooked simitars that flashed twice to every stroke of the unwieldy northern blades. Whenever the huge swords struck, they tore through shield, mail and bone, but when they missed, the lithe Berbers rushed in, hacking with their crooked blades as a cat claws.

In the center of the defense stood he who had cut the chain, his legs braced well apart, his red sword flashing. Gazing with horrified intentness, Fulvia saw a Moslem run under his guard and strike, saw him catch the simitar on his cross-guard and thrust his heavy iron pommel in the Berber's face, beating the Saracen's brains out.

Another took his place, a third dived between the legs of the Christian next in line, and both together slashed at the Christian leader. There was no room for him to use his mighty blade. Stooping swiftly, he caught one darting simitar on his tiny shield and took the other's cut on the chain mail of his left shoulder. The blood gushed from the rent where the Moslem blade had struck, but, before the blow could be repeated, the northerner stabbed upward with a broad knife snatched from his buskin and disemboweled the man who had wounded him. Once more he caught his other adversary's blow on his shield, and, on the instant, the Berber fell to the deck with his throat slashed nearly apart.

With incredible courage the Moslems hurled themselves upon their bigger adversaries, fighting on, despite fearful wounds, till the long blades cut them to pieces. Five of the Christians were badly wounded and as many more were cut and bleeding, but more than half the Berbers had gone down beneath strokes that cut from shoulder to waist or swept head from shoulders.

As the battle swirled, all formation was lost, and the watchers of Rocca Forte saw that the fanatic Berbers were striving for one thing and one thing only. Whereever he had first boarded, each fought with desperate energy to cut his way to the Christian captain. Toward him their weapons were turned; toward him their eyes rolled in an ecstasy of hatred. Yet, when they reached him, his long blade or his keen knife tore out their lives.

MEANWHILE the battle was developing with unequal fortunes between the crews of Fulvia and their two opponents. One Rocca Forte ship, captained by a big, black-bearded Norman, was fighting its way to a slow but certain victory. The heavy strokes of the Norman struck fear to the hearts of the Berbers and heartened the Arab crew, which pressed on with fierce, shrill shouts and biting blades. The Berbers had been repulsed, and the Rocca Forte men had boarded in their turn.

But their consort was hard-pressed. Forced back to the waist by superior numbers, her crew was suddenly swept by a storm of archery from the Berber galley whose port oars had been smashed by a catapult-stone. Unable to approach nearer, this craft now poured in arrow-flight after arrow-flight upon a few already fighting for life.

Fulvia could endure no more.

"Send a stone through her!" she ordered, pointing to the disabled but dangerous Moslem.

The crew of the nearest catapult shook their heads.

"The range is great, my lady," demurred the officer in command, "and our *Santa Lucia* lies between."

"Shoot!" Fulvia retorted. The soldier shrugged his shoulders and bent to his engine, but Jaufré thrust him aside.

"This takes a master hand," said the

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captain and himself discharged the catapult. The eyes of the garrison followed the stone with breathless anxiety. It soared up in the air, high against the sun, and then, after a sickening pause, began to descend. Its arc carried it barely past the maintruck of the *Santa Lucia*, across the intervening space of water, and just beyond the rail of the Berber. Straight through her it crashed, tearing a monstrous breach. Swiftly the doomed galley filled, heeled over, and sank. The eddy of her descent sucked down scores of turbaned heads. Those who survived swam, sword in teeth, toward the *Santa Lucia*, rolling in the swell of her enemy's last plunge.

Shifting her attention to the stranger galley, Fulvia saw there a little knot of Berbers standing back to back about the mast, still defiantly lashing out at a circle of great bodies and flashing broadswords. The struggle was almost over; scarce ten of the Moslems were left. The Christians took their time about the last strokes. Each marked his man and deliberately cut him down.

As the last fell, the galley's captain cried an order in a tongue unintelligible to the Sicilians. His men divided again into two parties, the larger of which sprang to the oars and pulled toward the *Santa Lucia*, while the lesser stood by to board. Smartly the port oars were drawn in at the moment before contact. Hull grated against hull and the swordsmen sprang to the rescue of those who had earlier rescued them. Straightway the rowers rose from their benches, snatched up their swords, and followed their comrades aboard the Sicilian.

As they charged the Berber rear, the fanatics faced about to meet them with beast-like snarls of rage. Once again Fulvia saw the Berbers hurl themselves against the center of the attack, where the leader of the strangers swung his terrible blade.

The Sicilian Arabs, heartened by the assault on the Berber rear, redoubled their strokes. Hemmed in on all sides, the fanatics fought with concentrated ferocity, heeding no wounds, asking no quarter. Nor did they receive any. The great swords before them and the simitars of the loyal Arabs behind cut them to ribbons, but they died fighting, man by man.

By the Christian captain's side stood a giant, seven feet tall, with a golden beard that fell to his girdle and shaggy golden hair. His helmet had been knocked from his head by a Saracen spear-thrust, his shield was slashed to pieces, but his weapon—a broadsword heavier than his master's—served as both sword and shield. He defended by attacking, with a cool, deadly savagery that was worse than fanatic fury. His blade whirled about him in circles; or, when there was too little room for a full stroke, he wielded it with little chopping cuts that bit through mail and flesh. In his great hands, with his mighty arms and titanic shoulders behind it, the weapon darted and flickered and danced as if it weighed no more than a poniard, yet its real weight could scarcely be less than fifty pounds.

The giant spoke a few words to his chief and the latter nodded. Heaving their swords on high, the two cried aloud in their strange tongue and leaped into the howling, struggling mass of their enemies. The tremendous swords fell, and two of the Berbers dropped beneath each, torn asunder as weeds are torn by a scythe. Again the swordsmen struck, this time in successive slashes over right and left shoulder. Three more Berbers slumped to the deck, cut fairly in two, while four others, reached by the long edges or the ripping points, dropped with mortal wounds.

The Africans, upheld by sheer religious intoxication, tried to rush in, but at once the two began to strike alternately, one guarding as the other hewed, and not a man passed those terrible blades. Meanwhile the boarders from the *Santa Lucia* hacked and stabbed at the Berbers from the rear, and now the second Rocca Forte galley, victorious after a bloody struggle, came up on the other side. For perhaps five minutes longer the slaughter went on, then the handful of Berbers remaining, hemmed in by overwhelming numbers, were thrown from their feet by a concerted rush and were disarmed and bound.

BIDDING Jaufré attend her, Fulvia descended the stone stair from the keep into the hall, and thence climbed down from the bailey to the foot of the castle-crag. There, on the stone quay, she waited for the victors. The strangers, returning to their own ship, brought the vessel alongside the quay, while the Rocca Forte men followed with the prisoners.

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The Christian captain and his gigantic companion landed first and, followed by the crew, advanced up the quay toward Fulvia. He was a tall man, though a foot shorter than the bearded giant. He was dark as an Arab but broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and powerful. His eyes were black, his nose slightly aquiline, his lips large and full but firm. He wore a long mustache, and his cheeks and chin were covered with two days' stubble of a strong beard. The lines in his face were clearly made by toil and care, for he could not have been above six and twenty. So much of the hair as showed under his helmet was black and wavy.

For a moment he looked from Jaufré to Fulvia, tall in her young beauty, then he spoke, in broken Norman-French—

"My lady, may Christ and His saints reward you for your good help, without which my men and I would have died wretchedly beneath pagan steel."

Fulvia held out one hand to him, but, instead of kissing it in Norman fashion, the stranger shook it as he would a man's. Pleased by the manner of his greeting, Fulvia said:

"You would have perished, but not miserably. I never heard, either in true tales or in romance, of such brave strokes as you and your fellows gave today. From what land do you come? You are Christians, but neither Frenchmen nor Germans, and Italy does not breed such men."

The stranger smiled.

"I am from Scotland," he answered. "I am called Ian Dhu Mackay. My uncle was Maormor—or Prince, as you would say—of Moray. This—" he indicated the giant beside him— "is my kinsman and lieutenant, Dugall Mor. We are returning from the crusade."

Trying to repeat his name, Fulvia laughed as the uncouth foreign syllables eluded her.

"You are welcome, Prince of Moray, to my house," she assured him. "You and your men shall be my guests for as long as it pleases you. But where is Scotland? For the name is strange to me."

"It is a great country, bordered on three sides by the sea and on the fourth by England."

"England I know, for it, like this land, is ruled by Normans," Fulvia said. "Is Scotland greater than England?"

"Smaller but greater," Ian Dhu answered with a slight smile. Fulvia looked at him quizzically.

"It is so great," he went on, "that even the Normans can not conquer it."

"Nor do I wonder at that," Fulvia laughed, "when I have seen the swords its people wield. But you will be tired and hungry. Let us see whether your countrymen are as great at eating as at fighting."

CHAPTER II

THE CRUSADER

GREAT was the banquet which the Countess Fulvia intended to prepare for her guests, and the preparations took much time. In the mean while there were wounded men to be cared for. Three of the strangers had been killed, seven dangerously wounded and a dozen less seriously injured. The Rocca Forte crews, Arabs, of slighter build and provided with less formidable weapons, had suffered sorely.

The dead having been washed, laid out and borne to the chapel, the wounded men were accommodated in the bailey, under the shade of the west wall, where water and bandages were in readiness. Aided by a few barbers' apprentices from the Arab village, Ibn Hawwas, Fulvia's Moslem physician and scribe, stripped the injured men of their armor and examined their hurts.

Ibn Hawwas was a wiry little Arab of perhaps five and sixty years, with a hawk-like face and beady, inscrutable eyes. His skill was great, for he had studied at the famous universities of Bagdad and Palermo, the centers of learning and science in the Moslem world.

The Scots at first shrank from him, till they saw their chief submit himself to Ibn Hawwas with perfect confidence. The wound in Ian's shoulder proved slight.

The Berber simitar had been turned by his mail and had cut away a bit of the flesh without penetrating deeply. After treating the raw cut with water and medicated vinegar, Hawwas pronounced it harmless.

It was already dark when the banquet was served in the great hall of the castle. The rank and file of the Scottish clansmen were entertained without in the torchlit

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bailey, under the stars, by the garrison of the castle. Only Ian, the huge Dugall Mor, and Ian's ten *duniwassals*—warriors of better blood and higher rank than the ordinary clansmen—feasted with Fulvia and her household in the hall. This household consisted of the Countess herself, Jaufré, the two lieutenants Raoul and Denis, the galley-captains, Hawwas and Fulvia's chaplain and serving-woman.

The Scots made brave pretense of indifference to the splendor of their entertainment, but their glances stole often to the costly tapestries which seemed, in the flickering light, alive with embroidered figures of warriors and ladies, hawks, horses, hounds and scenes of the chase, each figure marked at the neck with a glowing line of red silk, indicating the work of Moorish artists of Cordova. Nor did the guests succeed in hiding their admiration of the gem-like mosaic of the floor, the dainty Saracenic carving of the balcony that ran round the hall, the gleams of amethystine which sparkled now and then from the obscurity of the far-off, deeply coffered ceiling, as the torchlight flashed upon its vivid coloring.

In spite of their stern attempts at stolidity, their eyes opened wide at the gold and silver plates and tankards, the goblets of many-hued Moorish glass and the dainty napkins of linen, embroidered with jewel-like flowers. These last puzzled them grievously, for never before had the wild hillmen seen their use. Widely as they had traveled in their warfare for the cross, their experience was chiefly limited to camps and sieges, and the luxurious civilization of the East had been to them a thing to be hated and destroyed in the name of Christ.

Of two of the Scots this was not true. Observing the silent astonishment of the *duniwassals* with politely concealed amusement, Fulvia looked in vain for any primitive ignorance on the part of Ian and Dugall Mor. Their evident and absolute lack of embarrassment, their self-sufficiency in such unwonted surroundings, puzzled her. But she found no solution of the mystery till Ibn Hawwas, the physician, spoke to her in Arabic.

"My lady, hospitality is a beautiful thing and beloved of Allah, but is it wise to give to men, some of whom are wounded, this heady black Catanian?"

Instantly Ian Dhu broke in, saying, in perfect Arabic:

"Your leech is right, Countess Fulvia. Though the wine is delicious, my men are bound to drink too much, and it will inflame their hurts. With your favor, we will drink no more." Fulvia flushed.

"Neither Hawwas nor I guessed you understood," she confessed. "But indeed this wine, which I served you because it was the best in Sicily, is heady. It seems a strange thing to me, Ian Dhu, that men who speak French——"

She broke off, flushing again, but Ian smiled.

"That men who speak French as ill as we should speak Arabic fluently? It is no common thing, 'tis true. But is it not stranger that we, who have but now returned from the Holy Land, should have passed through the perils of a crusade, only to be assailed by Moslems off the shores of Christian Sicily?"

"Sicily is not altogether Christian," Fulvia replied. "But now that you have eaten, I pray you tell us of your adventures."

The Scots had eaten indeed, in a manner amazing to the temperate Normans. Though the feast had been spread with true Sicilian lavishness, the guests had devoured it like starving men. Roast ox, wild pig, fish boiled, baked and roasted, poultry, pheasants, fruits, puddings and confections had disappeared down those capacious throats with startling speed. Only Ian Dhu ate moderately; Dugall fed like three men.

Ian pushed back his oaken chair.

"I shall not tell you all," he began, "for it would last till you fell asleep. But this is the substance of our toils, or adventures, if you will:

"I AM an exile. My uncle, Angus Mackay, besides being Maormor of Moray, was grandson of Lulach, King of Scotland. By right of succession my uncle should have inherited the crown, but the usurper, Malcolm Canmore, proclaimed himself king by force of arms and, after Malcolm, the throne passed to his son David. My uncle, revolting against David, was defeated and slain. After his death, his son, my cousin, gathered the clan once more and raised his banner in defense of his claims. In

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the war which followed, my cousin was killed, and I, a lad of fifteen, was forced to flee. For eight years I lived in hiding near the coast, dwelling in caves and subsisting periliously by hunting and fishing.

"In the first year of my outlawry, a Moorish ship from Spain was cast up near my hiding-place. All on board were drowned save one man whom we rescued. He was an Arab of Granada, a very learned man, and from him I learned not only to speak his tongue, but to understand the poetry of his people and to know something of their religion. He dwelt with us as long as we abode in Scotland, since we dared not release one who had knowledge of our hiding-place.

"In the eighth year, King David being away in England and our rebellion somewhat forgotten, we ventured into the heart of Ross, and one day we came upon a great gathering of people in the fields, listening to words of a priest. He was preaching a crusade against the Saracens who had just won Edessa from the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem. The Holy City itself, he said, was imperiled. It was the duty of all good Christians to take the cross, to leave home and country and fly to the defense of Christ's sepulcher.

He who obeyed the sacred summons would receive absolution from his sins and forgiveness for offenses against the law. Being filled with zeal, I took the cross and all my men with me. Dugall here, whose faithful care had attended me from my earliest childhood, who trained me to arms and saved me more than once in battle, had no great desire to leave Scotland, even for his soul's sake, but he would not abandon me.

"So we joined with a great host of the King's men, our ancient enemies, and, all united now in the one passion for saving Jerusalem from the infidels, we sailed for Spain. An English fleet overtook us the second day out, and we were easily persuaded by its officers to land at Lisbon which was then held by the Moors. In mid-April of 1147 we landed, two years ago. The great city was surrounded by the tents of Alphonso, Christian Count of Portugal.

Alphonso welcomed us with great joy and stationed us on the north side of the wall where the siege was hottest. There I learned respect for English valor, for our comrades fought without fear or rest, having regard only for Christ and His church. We took the city in October and then resolved to leave off fighting the heathen in Portugal to fight him in Palestine.

"You know the miserable tale of the crusade: How the two Christian armies of Louis of France and Conrad the German were sold by the very Christians of Jerusalem whom they had come to save. You know how the forces of the Cross, becoming embittered, quarreled among themselves, lost Damascus, were consumed by battle and sickness and drifted hopelessly back to their own lands.

"We remained, protected from the Turkish sword both by our own keen weapons and by the protection of the Moslem Sultan of Iconium who was ever a friend to the Franks. But he perished, and we, set upon by the Turks, barely escaped with our lives and one ship.

"All went well till we passed the Straits of Messina and the eastern corner of your island. Then, suddenly, we were assailed by two Berber galleys. Being boarded by both at once, we lost over twenty men before we could drive the Moslems into the sea. By good luck we were then off an uninhabited shore with a deep cove, where we put in till our wounds were healed. We had no wish to meet more foes like the last till we were ready for them.

"Then all was fair sailing till this morning when we fell in with the six Berber galleys which drove us into your harbor. I know not why they attacked us. The Moslems of the African coast are not at peace with the Turks, and we have never had occasion to quarrel with them till they fell upon us. They were not pirates, for pirates, once beaten off, will flee. These men fought till they were destroyed.

"We have fought for the cross and have failed. We left our land two hundred and fifty strong, in three galleys. We return a scant hundred, in one ship, after battle and pestilence have had their will with us. Even the garments we wore when we left Scotland have worn to rags long since; only our armor and weapons remain."

"With such weapons you scarce need anything more," Jaufré commented soberly and the other Normans laughed.

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But Ian did not laugh. His head was bowed; his face was serious, almost gloomy.

Fulvia looked at him pityingly. He and his men were indeed a sorry spectacle, so far as outward appearance went. Worn with their struggles, ill-nourished with such poor fare as the scant spaces of their overcrowded galley had allowed them to take on their voyage, nearly in rags; now that their mail was off they looked almost like beggars. But, as men, they dwarfed even the sturdy, well-fed Normans of Rocca Forte; their limbs were big and well-muscled, their faces stern with courage and high resolve. And, as Fulvia remembered the valor they had shown in the recent battle, her pity turned to admiration.

Most of all she admired Ian Dhu. Dugall Mor was a finer physical animal, but he was no more than a superlative fighting man, a champion. The chief was more than this. He was a leader of men, wise as well as strong, and his features showed that war had strengthened rather than brutalized him. He was not like the fierce Normans who held Sicily by force and cunning; she could not imagine that Ian, like them, would oppress the helpless and bully the weak. There was gentleness as well as power in his eyes; he was conscious of his strength, but not arrogant.

Ibn Hawwas broke the silence.

"Do you not think, seignior," he asked, "that the Berber attack might have been a reprisal for your deeds against my fellow Moslems in the East?"

Ian looked at him curiously.

"This day," he said, "your fellow Moslems here defended me against their fellow Moslems the Berbers."

"That was not because they love Christians, but because they are loyal Sicilians," the physician retorted. "We Sicilian Arabs are true to King Roger, and Rocca Forte is true to the Countess Fulvia."

"Then there is no reason why the Berbers, who hate the Syrian Turks, should take vengeance on me for defending the cross, since you do not wish to do so."

"That is true," said Hawwas. "I asked simply because I can not understand these particular Berbers. They seem to hate you with a hate that is beyond understanding, and they hate us Sicilians too. When I went to bind the wounds of your prisoners, they spat upon my burnoose."

Fulvia shuddered.

"I too went to look at them where they lie bound in the dungeon," she said. "They not only spat at me; they called me by vile names."

Jaufré half-rose, his hand upon his dagger, but the countess bade him be seated.

"I can take care of them," she assured him. "They shall go to the king."

Hawwas shook his head.

"They are not fit for that," he protested. "Roger is not to be counted on. If you send them to him, he may have them broken on the wheel or he may set them free. Once free, there is no telling what harm their frenzied minds may work."

Ian Dhu sat up in his chair.

"If your king sets them free," he said quietly, "I will go to Palermo and have a word with him."

"And you would land in prison for your pains," the lieutenant, Raoul, remarked, yawning. "Roger is an ill man to beard."

Fulvia rose.

"I will make galley-slaves of them," she declared. "Once chained to an eighty-pound oar, there is not one of them who will ever work harm again."

The company left the table. Bidding good night to her guests, Fulvia delivered them into the care of Jaufré. The ten *duniwassals* were lodged with the Norman officers. Ian and Dugall followed Jaufré to a large chamber on the second floor of the keep.

The chamber was vaulted and massive-walled. Two arrow-slots in the west wall let in the cool night air; the door, opposite them, was of heavy oak, ribbed with iron bars. It gave directly on to the stairs leading down to the hall. There were a large bed and a pallet. Placing a torch in a stone socket near the door, Jaufré left them.

Ian was soon in bed but, after one look at the pallet, Dugall grunted.

"Where shall I put my legs?" he growled in Gaelic and, removing the clothes and mattress from the couch, he spread them on the stone flagging between his chief's bed and the door. He would have barred the door, but Ian forbade him.

"We are in a friendly house," he reminded his kinsman.

IT WAS black dark when Dugall woke. He woke suddenly out of a sound sleep, with a strange sense of something wrong. Yet, though his eyes were wide open, his native caution made him

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continue his loud snores while his ears strained for some sound to explain his feeling of danger. Ian Dhu's deep, regular breathing came undisturbed from the bed.

Silently Dugall rose from his mattress and tiptoed noiselessly across the floor. The latch tinkled faintly and was still. Dugall drew himself behind the casing to one side of the door.

The latch clicked again, ever so softly. Dugal felt—for it was too dark to see—that some one was slowly, carefully opening the door. Hand on knife, he waited.

Then a puff of cool air blew on his cheek and he knew the door was open. He drew his knife, held it behind him and waited, his eyes straining through the gloom.

A faint, whitish blur suddenly appeared on the door-jamb, almost before his face. With one swift stab Dugall drove his *skean-dhu* through the middle of the blur. He felt the point sink into something soft, then bury itself deep in the casing. A swift, gasping breath burst from the open doorway. Chuckling grimly, Dugall lay down on his pallet.

He woke at sunrise to find Ian Dhu sitting up in bed and staring straight before him. Dugall followed his gaze to the door. There, white with loss of blood, sagged a man, an Arab, whom the Highlanders had never seen before. His left hand was nailed to the door-jamb by Dugall's knife; from his nerveless right wrist a crooked dagger dangled on a strap. The threshold was sticky with blood.

CHAPTER III

THE AVENGERS

DUGALL MOR smiled seraphically upon his chief.

"Your knife," Ian said slowly. "When and how——"

Tersely Dugall explained.

"But why, in the fiend's name, did you not wake me? And why did you go to sleep again? He could have pulled the blade out with his left hand, if he had not been a fool, and then there would have been stabbing while we slept."

Dugall pointed once more to the haft of his *skean-dhu*, flush with the olive-wood casing. "Too deep," he explained. "It would have taken a stronger man than he to pull it out. The haft is so thick he could not tear himself away, either."

Ian rose, dressed rapidly and went over to the Arab, who was unconscious from loss of blood. His right arm alone prevented him from collapsing to the floor and was strained upward at a horrible angle. He was swathed from head to foot in black.

"So the guard on the landing would not see him," Ian commented. "That absolves the garrison. I thought for a moment it was treachery, but this would seem to show that no one but this man is involved. But what has he against us? And how did he get into the castle?"

"Call the guard," suggested Dugall.

Ian cried out in Norman-French. The guard, two men-at-arms stationed on the landing, stumbled up the stair and into the room. When they saw the inert figure hanging there, their jaws dropped and one cried—

"Mahmud!"

Ian looked at him questioningly.

"One of the armorer's assistants," the Norman explained. "A man the countess thought above suspicion." He examined the Moslem's dagger. "See how thin it is, yet how strong. If the door had been barred, he would have raised the bar between door and casing."

The guardsman tugged at the haft of the *skean-dhu*.

"St. John!" he cried. "What a blow! No man in Sicily could have done it!"

Instinctively he turned to the giant Dugall who smiled and, grasping the hilt, wrenched his knife out of the tough wood with one tug. The Normans opened their eyes wide. Mahmud sank inert to the stone floor. The guards lifted him up and bore him down the stairs.

Following, the Highlanders descended into the hall to find Fulvia staring at the guardsmen and their burden. She was white as ashes.

"That a man of mine should have done this!" she said in horrified tones when Ian had recounted to her what had happened. "He was as faithful as any servant I have. You saw how my Moslems fought for you yesterday. But how can I trust them now? Why——"

Ibn Hawwas entered from the court and came up to the group. Having heard the story, he reflected a moment while the Scots watched him with stern eyes.

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They were in no mood to trust any Moor.

Unperturbed, the physician clapped his hands, ordered the servant who appeared to bring water and, while it was being brought, deftly bound up the wound. Then he bathed Mahmud's temples and neck and forced some of the water between his lips. The Arab's eyes fluttered and a faint groan, instantly stifled, escaped him.

Cutting the thong that bound Mahmud's dagger to his wrist and removing the weapon, Hawwas asked:

"Why did you attempt the lives of your lady's guest?"

The Arab's lip curled in a snarl above his white teeth, but he made no answer.

"Torture him," suggested one of the guards.

Hawwas looked at the Norman contemptuously.

"He hung by that mangled hand till he fainted from pain and loss of blood," he said impressively. "Do you think that a man who could bear that would flinch under the torments? He is sustained by something more than mere courage, something which is too common among my people. Mahmud! You follow the Mahdi?"

The Arab spat feebly.

"May Allah curse all Christian dogs and idol-worshiping Moslem jackals!" he breathed savagely.

"I thought so," Hawwas exclaimed. "This man is an Almohade!"

Fulvia looked at him questioningly, but he turned to Ian.

"Seignior, yesterday, for the second time, you were assailed in Christian waters by Berber fanatics. Last night, under the roof of a strong and friendly castle—this. It all hangs together but, before I can be sure, I must know something else. Have you ever struck a blow against the Almohades or injured an Almohade, that they should seek vengeance against you?"

"Almohades? I do not understand," Ian answered. "What are they?"

"This is nonsense, Hawwas!" Fulvia broke in. "There are no Almohades in Sicily!"

"Here is one." Hawwas pointed to the prostrate Mahmud. "You heard him curse both Christians and 'idol-worshiping Moslems,' by which he meant the orthodox Mohammedans. That proves him an Almohade, and where one has crept in, hundreds may follow."

"Then the Almohades are not Moslems?" Ian asked in astonishment. "But this man called on Allah!"

"They are Moslems, but of a pernicious and evil sect which gnaws like a worm at the root of the pure faith of Islam," Ibn Hawwas explained. "They are dogs, swine, heretics, assassins! Their weapons are intrigue, poison and the knife. They are the mad disciples of the fanatic beggar Ibn Tumat—be he accursed!"

A snarl from the wounded Arab on the floor greeted this outburst. Hawwas scrutinized him with a practised eye and turned to the two soldiers.

"His strength is returning somewhat," he warned. "Bind him!"

The order was obeyed, and Hawwas went on:

"A GENERATION ago, Ibn Tumat, a Berber from the Atlas, gathered about him a small band of malcontents and fanatics and instilled into them his evil teachings. He preached that Allah was one and indivisible, that his divine attributes do not live separately from himself and that the holy saints of our faith, to whom we pay special honor, were no more than ordinary men. This is why Mahmud called the true followers of the prophet 'idol-worshipers.'

"The Berber folk are always eager for a new thing; so the new teaching spread, till the little band of disciples became a host. They had secret organizations in every city and village of northern Africa. The orthodox governors of seven cities suddenly perished of poison on the same day; one by one, those *imams* who preached most bitterly against Tumat and the *cadis* who condemned his followers were bribed or assassinated. No man of wealth or prominence was safe unless he joined them in secret and surrendered his wealth to their false prophet.

"At last they sprang to arms, doubtless at a signal, all over Morocco, and attacked the ameer. But they were defeated, and Tumat was mortally hurt. His chief disciple, Abd el-Mumin, hid the death of the teacher and gave out that Tumat had been taken alive to heaven. Mumin became his successor and the evil genius of Islam. No one knew who he really was; no one has seen his face, for he has always hidden it beneath a black veil. He calls himself the Mahdi.

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"For years the Mahdi withheld his people from open violence and gathered strength all that time. He worked by murder and intimidation. Countless wealth has come to him from those he has assassinated or frightened; his spies and murderers walk the streets openly, undetected, for no man knows who they are. He who kneels beside me in the mosque, who breaks bread with me, who sells me my medicines may be one of them for all I can tell. At any moment my most trusted friend may thrust a dagger into my back in the name of the Mahdi.

"I speak in figures. So far this Mahmud is the first Almohade to be detected in Sicily, but North Africa reeks with them and they swarm in Spain. Not three months ago they broke forth in undreamed-of strength, captured Marrakesh and proclaimed their Mahdi Ameer of Morocco. What, with open force and secret murder, they will yet do to this loyal island of ours is what they have done to Morocco, unless our king awakens to the danger."

"But what holds them together?" Ian asked. "If their leader should be slain, would they not fall apart again?"

"No, for fanaticism, the scourge of our faith, binds them. There have been secret orders amongst us Moslems before, but none so strong and dangerous. Mumin holds them not by drugs, not by gold, but by the sheer intoxication of religious frenzy. Paradise is promised to him who dies in the Mahdi's service. He who slays an orthodox Moslem receives a title of honor. They live purely, drink no wine, have little to do with women and mortify the flesh with bitter scourging. See!"

He stripped aside the black robes of Mahmud, and the man's back was a livid mass of terrible wales.

"So you see, Seignior Ian, that they are desperate men who fear not death, for through it they think to attain the joys of paradise. You have injured them in some fashion, else they would scarce have pursued you so bitterly, for ordinarily they take little heed of Christians. Nor is it your zeal in the crusade, for which may Allah forgive you! The Almohades would not stir a finger to help the Turks in Palestine whom they regard as infidels."

"But I have never heard of them till today!" Ian declared. "How could I have injured these Almohades?"

"You have been in Spain?"

"Portugal."

"It is all one; they are as thick in Portugal as in Spain."

Ian thought for a moment.

"I have heard the word Mahdi before," he reflected. "It was at the siege of Lisbon. We were storming the gate when the garrison made a sortie; a huge ameer led the sally, cutting down Portuguese men-at-arms with a great simitar till the assault wavered. I ran forward to meet him, swept the blade from his hand and smote him down with my sword. As he died, he ground his teeth at me, gasping—

"The hand of the Mahdi——!"

Hawwas nodded.

"That explains all. The ameer must have been one high in the councils of the Mahdi, a secret agent placed among the orthodox Moslems of the city. He doubtless had confederates in the garrison who saw you slay him and who have followed your trail to Palestine and back. The only thing which puzzles me is that you are still alive. Were no attacks made upon you in Palestine?"

"Many," Ian answered. "Thrice my food was poisoned. The first time one of the camp-servants tasted my meat before it was placed on the table and died in agony. Again, as I raised a cup to my lips, the wine spilled on my wrist and burned like fire. The third time I was taken sick with fever and my food was eaten by a Norman captain who visited me in my tent. Here is a patch on my mail shirt where the knife of a native guide struck from behind—almost hard enough. Once, in the fighting beneath the walls of Damascus, a troop of Frankish cavalry rode past us, and one of the horsemen struck at me with an ax. When I had slain him, I found him a Moslem in Christian armor who had mingled with our own men."

"Allah has preserved you wonderfully," Hawwas pronounced, with pious fervor. "Surely He must have a divine purpose to work out through your hands."

Fulvia interrupted the one-sided conversation.

"One thing is clear," she said. "So long as our guests remain here, we must watch over them with the utmost care. Guillaume, bid Jaufré post archers on the south wall of the bailey and keep, with orders to warn off any of my Moslems

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who may approach the foot of the rock. There may be more of the assassins even among my own people, though I grieve to think it, and the crag, though steep, may be scaled on that side. If any disregard the warning, let the archers shoot. Is this right, Hawwas?"

The physician nodded.

"I believe that all our folk are true," he said, "but our guests must be safeguarded." The soldier Guillaume bowed and went out. The other man-at-arms led the half-fainting but defiant Mahmud to the dungeon.

"BUT, by your leave, Seignior Ian," Hawwas resumed as they sat down to breakfast, "I would ask you to hold your men well in hand. You have been a crusader, an enemy of my faith, and wherever you may go throughout the countryside, or even in the Christian town east of the castle, you will see many Moslems who are faithful, honest citizens. If your warriors, in misplaced zeal, lay hands upon them, you may kindle a fire in Sicily that oceans of blood will not drown."

"He speaks truth, Ian Dhu," Fulvia broke in before the Scot could speak. "Be not offended. You are not in Palestine where all Moslems are your enemies, but in a land whose people, of many faiths and many bloods, are at least half Arab. They are honest men and true vassals. You owe much to the Moslem crews of my galleys. Forgive me if I remind you of it. I myself was once saved from shame, and my father from death, here in this very hall by our loyal fisher-folk."

"Well I know that Moslems, as Moslems, are as honest a folk as Christians," said Ian cordially. "I hold no hate against them, except against those who seek my life or those who wage war against my fellow Christians in the East. I took the cross, not to slay Mohammedans but to save Jerusalem."

"Then you are a rare Christian," Hawwas broke in with a touch of bitterness. "Some of your coreligionists have waged war on our faith without mercy or humanity."

"I know," Dugall Mor cried fiercely. "You should have seen how Conrad's Germans attacked the cities of Iconium which, though Mohammedan, had always been friendly to us. The path of the German march was black with fire and destruction; the bodies of women and little children strewed the roads behind their armies."

"We ourselves have not been wholly blameless in Iconium," Ian confessed sadly. "Ill did we repay the kindness of the sultan."

Hawwas's face darkened.

"How was that?"

"The Sultan of Iconium, as you know, was the stanch ally of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem. After the German king's savage raid, we were sent by the English commanders to the border, with a body of Normans, to prevent a second attack on our Moslem allies. We Scots, being separated from the Normans, were suddenly attacked by several hundred Saracens. After a sharp fight, we beat them back and pursued them far into the marches of Iconium.

"They fled toward a large cavalcade of Moslems apparently coming to their aid, and, as these rode up, we charged them. But they were too many for us and surrounding us on all sides, slew twoscore of my men and captured the rest. When the battle was ended, those who had first attacked us had disappeared, as they were well able to do, knowing the country. Then we learned from our captors that we had been drawn into assailing a friendly force sent out by the sultan to escort Gulnar, his favorite wife, on a pilgrimage to Aleppo. We had done them so much harm that the pilgrimage had to be abandoned, and they took us back to the sultan who very justly threw us into prison.

"But he treated us courteously and, after visiting me in my confinement, he expressed his regret that he must hold me a prisoner till the crusading armies indemnified him for the attack. He was especially kind to us because in the battle I had withheld my men, who were blind with the rage of fight, from attacking the litter in which the sultana was carried. Both he and Gulnar came to see us often, and at last Gulnar persuaded him to set us free.

"Nevertheless, there sprang up a false report that we had knowingly and wickedly attacked our Moslem allies for the sake of plunder. The people of Iconium, enraged by this lying tale and by our escape, revolted, attacked the capital, and slew

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the generous sultan. We heard afterward that the sultana, Gulnar, had disappeared, and it was feared that she perished."

The beady eyes of Hawwas glittered.

"It fits! It fits!" he cried. "Truly Allah is angry with His people. Those men who first attacked you must have been Almohades sent thither by the Mahdi to lure you into a breach of the treaty with Iconium, hoping that you might perish at the hands of the sultan. They could easily have known of the pilgrimage and planned to draw you on by their flight till the caravan-escort came up, and then fled into the desert while you were engaged with the sultana's guards.

"Yet I have never before heard of Almohades in the East. In Morocco and Spain, yes; but in Syria, never. Of course the attempts to murder you were the work of a few men, spies. What surprizes me is the apparent presence of any large, organized number of them in that part of the world. It must be that the Mahdi has resolved to kill you at all costs."

Fulvia's blue eyes challenged Ian's; her dark cheeks were flushed prettily.

"The Sultana—was she beautiful?" she asked.

"More beautiful than any woman I have seen—save one," the Scot replied.

"And that one? A countrywoman of yours, perhaps?"

The countess spoke quite casually.

Ian looked her straight in the eyes.

"That one," he said without a trace of gallantry, "is yourself, Lady Fulvia."

Fulvia took the compliment as it was given. Ian had spoken without flattery, as one making a simple statement of fact; and, honestly knowing herself to be beautiful, she was neither flattered nor offended. If there had been the least tinge of sentiment in his tones, she would have resented it at once. She had found out what she wished to know and changed the conversation.

"It seems, Sir Scot, that you have escaped miraculously from dangers greater than you understood or dreamed," she said seriously. "Having been driven, friendless and in hard case, on my shores, you have no choice in your actions for some time to come. Your men are weary and wounded, you have scarce garments enough to cover you and you are in a strange land. You must be my guests, accept my hospitality and the gift of good clothes and armor, and allow my walls to keep you safe from your powerful, cunning enemies until you are able to continue your voyage."

Ian bit his lip.

"I understand your generosity and I thank you for it. But I can not accept. We Scots are too proud to beg and too poor to pay. You have done too much for us already. We shall return as soon as my ship can be overhauled. As matters stand, I have only gratitude to offer you for your great kindness."

Fulvia rose, her eyes flashing.

"How have I done more for you, then, than the Sultana of Iconium?"

"Do not forget that we brought ruin upon her in return for her protection," Ian sadly answered. "I would not expose you also to the merciless anger of my enemies."

"You Scots are proud indeed—too proud. Since you will not accept what is freely offered, I must sell it to you. Will you remain with me as my servants, as my men-at-arms, and fight my battles for me?"

Dugall Mor, clearly overjoyed at Fulvia's offer, clapped his chief on the back, exclaiming loudly in Gaelic. Ian rose and bowed.

"It is a fair bargain," he commented. "If you are endangered by your protection of me and my men, we will keep you safe with our swords. As you have seen, they are keen and heavy."

THE meal over, Fulvia invited her new officer to join her in examining the galley-slaves rescued from the three Berber ships which had been taken unsunk. Those in the other vessels, chained to their oars, had perished. There were nearly three hundred of them, mostly Christian captives from Tripoli and Marrakesh, with a sprinkling of Jews. Toughened as they had become by their hard labor, they were filthy, covered with vermin and terribly scarred by the whips of their brutal taskmasters.

After looking them over carefully, Fulvia had the Jews set apart from the others and delivered her decision:

"The Hebrews, being traders by nature, shall be settled in the Jewish quarter of my town of Rocca Forte where they may ply their trades as free men. I will give

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each an allowance of one bezant which he may repay from the profits of his industry. You Christians shall receive land on my estate of Castrocavalli and be free tenants, with a yearly rent of a twentieth of your products. Any who have homes and wish to return to them may apply to the king for permission."

But to return to their homes was impossible and they knew it. The Almohades were masters there and would send them back to the galleys. With one accord they fell on their knees before the countess, thanking her for her bounty with tears in their eyes—all save one man. He was a little, shriveled Greek with an enormous, almost chinless head, deeply wrinkled face and great, glowing eyes. Wringing his hands helplessly, he stood like a monument to misery amid the kneeling slaves.

"Well," Fulvia inquired sharply, "what would you? Is not my offer a just one?"

"Ah, noble lady," he wailed, "I cannot toil in the fields. I know nothing of flocks and crops. I am a seaman."

"Then I can use you on my galleys. You shall be an overseer to your former masters if you can get on with my Moslem crews."

The little man's wobegone expression slipped from him instantly. He stood stiff and straight before her, his eyes flashing proudly.

"I, Basil Heraclides, a common overseer of slaves!" he cried in a cracked voice. "I, who have been high admiral of the fleets of Constantinople? Kill me first!"

Fulvia stared at him in astonishment. After a little her lips twitched and suddenly she broke into uncontrollable laughter. It was incredible, ludicrous that the dwarfish scarecrow who stood before her could have been a noble and commander of the great navies of the Eastern Empire.

They made an amazing picture as they faced each other: The tall, beautiful girl, clad in richest, softest silk and laughing till the tears ran down her cheeks; and the absurdly dignified little man, filthy and ragged, furious at her amusement, but somehow no less imposing than comical. He stamped his foot and rolled his eyes, shouting:

"I tell you it is true! I am a Greek of purest blood, a scholar, a mathematician, a chemist, a strategist, a philosopher! You have no right to mock me, you with your pitifully crude catapults, your miserable archery, your tiny galleys manned with fishermen and captained by brawny, wooden-headed fools!"

Fulvia's lips still laughed, but her eyes smoldered.

"Those crude catapults and wooden-headed warriors of mine saved you from the slave-bench, O son of Hercules!"

This was in mockery of his heroic name, Heraclides, which fitted him as a soldier's armor would fit a sickly child.

"Not you and your blundering knaves saved me, but this champion here with his titan's sword!" Heraclides retorted, pointing at Ian.

The Highlander interfered.

"Much wisdom may be stored up in a little body," he said. "This man's eyes speak the truth, Lady Fulvia. You can easily find out whether his lips do likewise. Set him to work improving your 'crude catapults' and see what will come of it. If he has indeed commanded the fleets of the Greek emperor, he may be of great service to you."

The scarecrow flashed him a look of gratitude.

"Try me!" he implored. "Give me a laboratory and chemicals, and I will reward you with a gift beyond price! I will give you the greatest secret of the East!"

"Well, it can do no harm," Fulvia decided. "Forgive me, Seignior Basil, for my levity. If you had seen me in rags in the slave-market, you would hardly have picked me out as Countess of Rocca Forte."

Instantly mollified, the little man bowed gallantly.

"If I had seen you a beggar in the Syrian Quarter—which God forbid!" he cried, "I should know you for countess and angel both!"

"Then this has been a day of note," Fulvia smiled, "since it has seen an admiral of the emperor scolding an angel."

An hour later Basil Heraclides, bathed and well-clothed, sat at his ease in the great hall in animated conversation with Fulvia, Ian, and Ibn Hawwas. With scrupulous courtesy, he addressed himself primarily to the countess, but his eyes wandered often to Ian with an expression of dog-like devotion. It was plain that he regarded the Scot as the chief source of his deliverance.

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Hawwas deftly led the talk to learned subjects — chemical reactions, algebraic formulæ and the philosophy of physics. It was easily apparent that the Greek was on his own ground, for he talked with enthusiasm as well as ease. Occasionally he shot a question at Hawwas, and the scholarly physician, trained in the best schools of the Orient, usually confessed himself unable to answer. At last Hawwas rose.

"I can not sit in the presence of my master," he acknowledged. "Let me make obeisance to one whose knowledge exceeds that of the wisest of Bagdad."

And make obeisance he did, to the unspeakable delight of the conceited Heraclides.

But Fulvia who, like most women of her time, was abler at active affairs than at learning, was frankly bored and took the occasion to change the subject.

"How is it," she inquired, "that so wise and great a man fell to the wretched estate of a galley-slave?"

Heraclides leaped from his seat, grimacing with rage and shaking both his fists.

"It was that hound Christodoulos!" he fairly shrieked. "May he writhe in ——!"

With fierce gestures, striding up and down the room, he told a tale of intrigue common enough in the Eastern Empire, but strange and wonderful to his hearers.

HE HAD been the favorite officer of the late emperor, John Comnenus, who loved and valued learning. The emperor had placed him in command of his hundreds of galleys, clothing him with authority little less than royal.

At that time the Byzantine navy, which had ruled the seas for generations, was suffering from a succession of corrupt and inefficient officers. The degenerate logothetes who mismanaged it were ignorant of scientific warfare, knew little even of navigation and were entirely devoid of honor or patriotism. High office meant to them only an opportunity to amass wealth through diversion of the enormous sums the emperor spent on his fleets.

Buffeted by the growing power of the Turks, menaced by the greedy German Empire in the west, Constantinople relied for its very existence on its powerful navy—not on the valor of its men, for the Eastern Empire had long forgotten the glorious traditions of the Hellenic heroes and the Roman Cæsars. Its sailors, like its soldiers, were weak and cowardly. Its great strength lay in its unequaled strategy and its well-equipped laboratories, in the vast treasures of science which it had dug from the accumulated strata of Greek, Roman and Oriental wisdom.

Above all, the navy of Constantinople possessed a secret which made courage unnecessary and blunted the weapons of its most heroic foes—the secret of Greek fire. This was a substance composed of chemicals which, when discharged from wall or deck upon a hostile craft, burst into raging, uncontrollable flame that consumed all in its path. Nothing would extinguish it; water only made it burn the more fiercely. Against this weapon the strongest fleets were helpless; by its means the Eastern emperors kept their foes at bay and maintained their waning prestige.

But this secret, handed down from one high admiral to his successor, unknown to all other men in the world, had been lost. Heraclides himself was the last to possess it. When he fell from power, he had not revealed it to his successor, and Constantinople was stripped of her one invulnerable defense.

As admiral, Basil Heraclides had striven with all the might of his enthusiastic soul to purge the navy of its inefficiency and corruption. He had discharged from office all who were unworthy to carry on the traditions of the empire and filled their places with deserving seamen whom he had tirelessly trained. Within a few years the great fleet was more formidable than ever before. Its crews were well-drilled, its officers masters of naval strategy, its squadrons maneuvered with beautiful skill and precision. Basil had one ideal, one dream: To see the empire recover the power and glory it had enjoyed under the great Justinian.

Then he fell, the emperor died, and his son Manuel came to the purple. Manuel was entirely under the influence of Christodoulos, a renegade from Islam whom Heraclides had ousted from command of the Ægean fleet for secretly negotiating with the Turks. After his disgrace, Christodoulos had intrigued with Venice whose policy it was to keep the Eastern Empire helpless at sea and dependent on the Venetian navy.

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Out of the huge sums he received from Venice, Christodoulos made large presents to Manuel, and, on Manuel's succession, Heraclides was superseded by the treacherous renegade. Not only that, but he was banished from the court on a trumped-up charge, and, when his zeal for his country's welfare brought him back in spite of his banishment, Christodoulos had had him seized and imprisoned. From prison he had been stolen away at night by emissaries of Christodoulos who sold him to the Berbers. Since that night he had been a galley-slave.

"And Christodoulos?" Fulvia inquired with a smile for the eye of Hawwas.

Heraclides ground his teeth.

"The dog was detected in an attempt to sell the entire fleet to Venice, not a month after he disposed of me. The Berber overseer whose whip had scourged my back told me in order to torture me. I know not what has become of him since."

"I can tell you," said Fulvia. "He fled to Sicily. He was received kindly by our king who made him admiral of our fleets. For five years he scoured the African coast, winning great battles for us against the Moors. At last he fell under suspicion, though there was no proof against him, and George of Antioch succeeded to his post. Yet Christodoulos has managed to regain the king's favor, and, though Roger will not trust him with the fleet, he admits him to his councils of state."

The little Byzantine ranted furiously. At last he sighed, grew calmer and then said almost quietly:

"Henceforth I live but for two things: to take vengeance on my enemy and to repay you, Lord Ian, and you, my lady, for saving my poor life. I know the lord Ian has enemies, for I have suffered too long on that devilish galley not to know the nature of the Almohades. They will follow you to the death, seignior, but it will be their own deaths, not yours. I, Basil Heraclides, will be present at the final settlement and I will save you even as you saved me. Fear not, for I am with you!"

It was with difficulty that Fulvia and Ian repressed their amusement, but Hawwas, whose eyes had scarcely left the little Greek since he entered the room, felt no desire to laugh.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE NAME OF THE KING

"THAT is Gui."

A horn had pealed beyond the barbican at the foot of the ramp. Fulvia nodded to Jaufré, and he strode out from the hall to order the lowering of the drawbridge.

"Gui," the countess explained to Ian, "is steward of my estate at Castrocavalli, a day's ride inland."

Presently Gui entered, a tall, slender, sinewy young man, swarthy as a Moor, with challenging black eyes. He spoke in French, but his accent proved him a Provençal. Though he addressed Fulvia, he glanced curiously at Ian. At once the countess presented him to the Scot, who greeted him cordially. Gui, however, returned the greeting coolly. It was clear the two men were not born to be friends.

"I sent for you," Fulvia addressed her steward, "because I wish you to conduct Seignior Ian to Castrocavalli Castle, four days hence. He and his men will form part of your castle till they know the country thereabouts well."

Then, briefly, she told him the circumstances of Ian's arrival at Rocca Forte.

Gui bowed.

"As my lady wills," he said somewhat ungraciously.

"And now, Ian Dhu, I must ask you to let me speak with Seignior Gui apart," the countess said.

When the Highlander had gone, Fulvia laid one hand on Gui's shoulder. The young man started and flushed.

"What a rash, presumptuous, foolish lad you are, Gui!" she said firmly but with gentle kindness.

The Frenchman held her gaze with a look at once sullen, bitter, and worshiping.

"You must grow up," she went on. "How many times have you asked me to marry you, Gui?"

"Seven," he replied sulkily.

"And seven times I have refused. Do you not think I know my own mind?"

She spoke reproachfully but with an almost maternal tenderness.

"You have no chance of altering my decision. You have heard of the things that have happened to those foolish men who would not take a refusal from me."

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"Why may I not hope, so long as there is no other?" he asked, his eyes lighting up fiercely.

"Because you are not the kind of man I shall marry. No, do not bite your lip. I am not disparaging you. You are brave, loyal and honest. But so is my captain, Jaufré, yet he does not trouble me with his importunities."

Gui's head lifted haughtily.

"I am no mere man-at-arms. I am a de la Garde of Tarascon," he boasted proudly.

"You have told me that fifty times. But if you were all your great ancestors rolled into one and came from the kingdom of heaven, you would have no better claim to my hand. The man who takes me to wife must be stronger than I, more cunning, better with head as well as hand. You have brawn and muscle, Gui, but you have small wit in that mad, hot brain of yours.

"You are ceasing to be of use to me. Every man who visits my castle has to bear your silly jealousy. You look upon every stranger as a rival for my hand. Therefore I will tell you two things now which should cure your madness and make you once more a valuable servant: First, I will never marry you; second, I have never seen the man I would marry.

"You showed your spite to Ian Dhu. If he were your rival, you would have small chance against him, for he is of royal blood and a better soldier than you. But he is here only because, for the present, he has no other place to go, and I have yet to find in him the qualities I demand in a husband. Is this plain enough? Will you treat him with the courtesy he deserves?"

Gui, like all his race, was as romantic as he was brave. His nature, fierce and challenging toward men, was mystically tender toward women. His eyes filled with tears.

"It is enough," he answered sorrowfully. "I will do as you bid me."

Relenting, Fulvia gave him her hand. He kissed it passionately and turned abruptly away.

AS HE left the hall, Ian Dhu came face to face with Hawwas. The Arab took his arm and drew him aside.

"Forgive me," he began, "if I say unpleasant things, Seignior Ian."

The Scot nodded, and he continued.

"If all turns out well, you may be of more service to the Lady Fulvia than you dream of. I suppose you desire to repay her for the favor she has shown you?"

Ian's dark eyes bored into the physician's as if seeking the reason for the question.

"You know I desire it."

"Then you would not wish to bring her into danger, and she is in grave danger of falling under the king's displeasure for entertaining you."

"Then I will leave at once," Ian replied.

"That would offend her and deprive her of the assistance which she may need. The damage is done, after all, for you have already brought down upon her the anger of the Almohades. You would do best to stay if you can conduct yourself wisely."

"Speak up, man!" Ian retorted sharply. "Say what is in your mind, and have done!"

The physician looked at him speculatively, stroking his white beard.

"It is easy to see that you are a better man than most," he said with irritating deliberation, "but I must confess, Sir Scot, that I am not yet prepared to like you. No, do not interrupt. The Lady Fulvia is the child of a man whom I served and loved for forty years. I was her mother's physician and was present at her birth. That which I say to you now comes from the heart of an old man who has no other hold on life than his love of her. Pardon me, therefore, if my devotion to my lady makes me discourteous to you."

Ian's face relaxed its sternness.

"I am willing," he warmly assured the old man, "to guide my conduct by her best interest. I will do whatever you advise me."

Hawwas smiled.

"Now I am sure I like you, though you have brought trouble to a peaceful house and are like to bring more. In short, you are a crusader, and King Roger is none too fond of crusaders. He has welded together a kingdom out of a strange confusion of peoples and faiths: native Greeks and Latins—both Christians, though of different creeds—Moslems, numerous and turbulent, Normans, conquerors and tyrants; and many others.

"In the main, the Greeks and Latins are the traders, as are the few Jews. The Normans are a mere handful, but they are strong and masterful. My own people

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are the artists, artizans, sailors and scholars. Moreover, Roger favors them. Three-fourths of his army, though captained by Normans, is Moslem. We Sicilian Moslems are both tolerant and loyal but we do not love the enemies of our faith.

"You have been such an enemy. You must not expect my fellow countrymen to love you. Unless you conduct yourself wisely here, you must look for trouble from King Roger who will not permit anything to create a breach between him and his Moslem subjects."

"Is your king a Christian or a disciple of Mohammed?" Ian interrupted hotly.

"He is both—in religion a Christian, in policy a Moslem. If he did not show all creeds and races favor, some would revolt and his kingdom would fall to pieces. He must respect our prejudices, or this island would at once split into warring factions.

"The Pope strove mightily to involve Roger in the crusade. The great Christian monk, Bernard of Clairvaux, whose preaching fired all France and Germany with zeal for the enterprise, pleaded in vain with all his eloquence before our king. Roger held resolutely aloof."

"To his eternal shame!" broke in the Scot.

"You speak as a Christian. I, as a Moslem and a Sicilian, say it was to his eternal honor. If he had joined the crusade, Roger would have found himself in the midst of a bloody rebellion. To secure the stability of his kingdom, he refused. He had just ended a long and successful war with Germany, was on the brink of war with Constantinople and needed to conserve his strength against the time when the greedy German, returning from Palestine, would fall upon him again. Therefore he could not risk offending his Mohammedan subjects, and he owed it to them, as a sacred duty, to respect their faith."

"Then I, as a crusader, am unwelcome in his land," Ian reflected.

"Probably. If you are quiet, he will doubtless let you alone; but if you do anything to displease the Moslems, his wrath will descend upon you. As it is, you will certainly hear from your adventure of last week, for it is not to be supposed that the story will not reach his ears, and in a distorted form, just as the report of your doings in Iconium were misrepresented."

Ian pondered.

"Then what shall I do?" he asked.

"Write a letter to King Roger telling in your own words of the Berber attack. Tell him your enemies were not true Moslems, but Almohades and therefore his enemies. I will write also for the Lady Fulvia, confirming your story. It may be that he will believe you and grant you his protection. If he is reached first by a false account—for there are doubtless Almohade agents in Sicily—I advise you to disappear."

"I will send him a letter," Ian promised.

"Then do so at once. If you can not write, I will take down the letter for you in Arabic, which Roger reads as well as he does French, Greek or Latin."

Ian smiled.

"I can not write my native tongue," he said ruefully, "but, thanks to my Spanish teacher, I write Arabic."

AT DINNER Gui and Ian met again, and the Frenchman proved most amiable, now that he was relieved of his fear lest Ian prove a rival. Having dispatched his letter to the king the Highlander felt more at ease and the meal passed off with great gaiety.

Suddenly, as they sat at wine, there was a commotion in the bailey; the drawbridges over the two concentric moats were raised, the portcullises dropped with a clang of iron, and scurrying feet crossed and recrossed the flagged courtyard. Jaufré left the table in haste and returned to report a large body of horsemen approaching up the Palermo road.

Soon a trumpet was blown from the foot of the crag, the challenge of the guard rang out from the barbican and a man-at-arms brought the answer to the hall.

"Seignior Hugo of Corleone is at the outer gate and asks for an audience with the Lady Fulvia," he announced.

"Admit him," Fulvia commanded, the blood flowing back into her cheeks.

Ponderously the portcullises rose again and down dropped the drawbridges across the moats.

Gui laughed shortly.

"I thought we should have a battle," he said. "Though there has been peace for eight months now."

"Aye," Fulvia remarked, "there has been peace and safety for all since Roger returned from Bari. Before that every

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baron did as he liked; the poor were oppressed and the weak destroyed."

A shadow fell across the archway and, with a clinking of mail, Hugo of Corleone entered. He was a powerful, finely made man of about five and forty, with thick brown hair grizzled at the temples. Square-jawed, round-headed, with keen, kindly eyes, he was a splendid example of the Norman type at its best.

Fulvia rose, her blue eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Welcome, Seignior Hugo the Hammer!" she cried. "You have not visited me often since you so generously surrendered to me at the Pass of Blood."

The Norman threw back his head and laughed loudly.

"Spare me, my lady!" he implored in a rich, resonant voice. "I am not the only one of your suitors whom your beauty and valor have conquered."

She gave him her hand.

"You are the only one who still lives, save the few who have been wise enough to seek me peacefully. But enough of that; you are thrice welcome, Hugo. Gui you know; Jaufré and Ibn Hawwas also. This is Ian Dhu, Prince of Moray in Scotland, who has consented to serve under my banner."

Hugo seized Ian's hand in an iron grasp.

"My lady has a strong champion, then," he remarked cordially. "I have heard something of your swordsmanship, Seignior Ian."

"We were speaking," Fulvia informed him, "of the peace that has prevailed in Sicily since the king returned from Italy."

Once more Hugo laughed.

"He is a lion, our king. A sleepy lion, it is true, but when he does awake, his bite is terrible. Have you heard, Seignior Ian, of the great assizes?"

Ian shook his head and Hugo explained.

"During the long years of the struggle between Sicily and the Germans, Roger was with the army in Italy. Those of his barons who remained at home—and they were many—took advantage of his absence to strengthen their castles, plunder their neighbors and oppress the peasants. When the king returned, the people laid before him many grievous complaints against the barons, and he passed laws against murder, pillage and oppression.

"But the barons laughed at his laws and went on in their evil courses. Roger waited in patience, for the barons were at once the wo and the strength of Sicily. But last year, after the death of the Count Arnulfo, our Lady Fulvia's father, the king's patience deserted him. The sleeping lion woke. He called a general assembly of all the barons to meet at Palermo.

"They came, every man with a troop at his back. But Roger summoned them into the great hall of the palace where there was no room for their men-at-arms. Appearing in his robes of state, the king read to them a new code of laws forbidding violence, disorder, oppression, excessive taxation or injustice on penalty of death. As soon as he had finished reading he clapped his hands, and the gallery around the hall was filled with Moslem archers and spearmen.

"In a panic, the barons rushed for the doors, but they were barred. Fulk of Cefalu drew his sword and fell with an arrow through his body. That ended the opposition. Every baron swore to uphold the new laws and, though there may have been some oppression since, there has been no open war and no highhandedness.

"Such is our king's way. He endures long, but when he opens his sleepy eyes and gives an order, it is well to obey."

"Just now he sleeps," Fulvia commented. "Otherwise George of Antioch would have patrolled the coast too well for the Berbers to have slipped through."

"He sleeps not," Hugo contradicted. "George of Antioch has been away with the entire fleet on a secret mission. The secret is out at Palermo now, for the admiral has sent a swift ship back with the news that our galleys have seized Corfu from the Eastern Empire, defeated a combined Byzantine and Venetian fleet, escorted King Louis of France safely back from Palestine and invaded the very harbor of Constantinople, burning the emperor's palace with fire-arrows!"

With one accord the company rose to its feet.

"By the glory of God!" Gui swore. "Our king is a man!"

"It could not have been done if I were still in the emperor's service!" cried a cracked voice from the stair.

It was Basil Heraclides. Fulvia presented him to Hugo and explained the little Greek's story.

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"Neither George of Antioch nor Roger himself could stand against the imperial fleet if its officers still knew the Greek fire," Heraclides said sadly.

Hugo would have laughed but a glance from Fulvia checked him. He addressed Heraclides courteously:

"So you also, great admiral, felt the enmity of the Berbers?"

"Aye, may their souls roast forever. But for the courage of this young man——"

Hugo stopped him.

"It is of this young man I would speak," he said, his good humor changing suddenly. His tones were grave and concerned.

"SEIGNIOR IAN, I grieve to say that a heavy accusation has been laid against you. I should have spoken of this at first, but I am none too fond of unpleasant subjects and I have confidence in the Lady Fulvia. But duty is duty.

"You are accused, together with your men, of wantonly attacking a peaceful fleet of Moslem merchants, of slaughtering them mercilessly and stealing their goods. It is alleged that the Lady Fulvia assisted you in your crime, and harbored you afterward, against the law of the realm."

"By Saint Brighid, it is false!" cried Ian.

Fulvia was on her feet, her face flushed, her eyes snapping. Gui, hot-headed as always, laid his hand on his sword.

"I know it is false," Hugo admitted calmly. "I am on a dirty errand and I like it ill, but the king has ordered your immediate arrest, and I have come to arrest you."

"If you will wait till I can get my sword and rouse my men," Ian suggested with cold politeness, "I will give you a chance to arrest me. You are surely too brave a man to attack me at a disadvantage."

Fulvia's hand was on Hugo's arm.

"You have said that you do not believe this false accusation, that you trust me, Hugo," she pleaded. "You are one of the few men I have ever known whose honor I respect and can appeal to. For my sake—and remember that I once treated you generously—do not go on with this shameful thing."

Hugo shook his head sorrowfully.

"It is my duty," he declared sturdily. "It is the king's command. I have never failed him yet. If the Seignior Ian will go back with me peacefully, I will use all my influence with the king in his favor. Roger will hardly do worse than imprison him, for a foreign prince is not subject to the death penalty in this or any other realm. But go with me he must."

"What if I refuse?" Ian asked, his eyes narrowing.

"In that case I must go back to my men and lay siege to this castle, for I am ordered to take you."

"You will not take me alive," the Scot warned him. "I am innocent of the crime charged against me. I am a crusader, by the Pope's decree immune from attack or prosecution in any Christian land. I will not submit to the order of a king who proved false to Christ by refusing to take the cross."

"But listen, seignior, I would not willingly draw sword against any who bear the cross. My sister's son—I have neither wife nor child and he was as a son to me—was slain by a Turkish arrow at Damascus. I would have taken the cross myself, had not the king forbidden me. Come with me quietly; I will entreat his Majesty on my knees for you. It was only to save you and the Lady Fulvia from worse harm that I undertook this errand.

"The accusation against you was brought by the foremost Mohammedan merchants of Palermo and was strongly urged by Christodoulos, without whose intervention the king would not have listened to it, much as he favors his Moslem subjects. The weight of the Greek's argument decided him. Christodoulos himself asked to be sent after you, but he is a slippery rascal whom I neither like nor trust, wherefore I begged the king to let me go instead. My esteem for Countess Fulvia and my distrust of the renegade made me fear that some treachery was intended against both of you. You may rely upon me so far as my power goes. Resistance would but anger Roger against Fulvia; he would send an army against her, pull Rocca Forte to pieces and cast her into prison."

Heraclides, his eyeballs rolling with rage, broke into curses upon his wily countryman.

"I might have known," he cried, "that that dog Christodoulos would be in league with the Berbers! He would take gold from the devil; nor does he need to be

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bribed, for he loves treason for its own sake!"

"But what has he against me?" Ian exclaimed.

Hugo shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing. These Almohades you tell of must be paying well for his services, that is all. If he had come and taken you, his way would have been to give you a chance to escape on the way. Then, while you fled, an arrow between your shoulders! I came to prevent just that—and to learn what was afoot."

Fulvia was white with anger.

"You shall not have him!" she said in low, vibrant tones. "Let the king imprison me, torture me, kill me! Never will I be so base as to betray my guest, my officer who has broken bread with me and taken shelter under my roof! Go, Seignior Hugo, lay siege to my walls! You shall not lay a hand on him while one man remains alive under my banner!"

"Well spoken!" cried Gui, but Ian walked over to Hugo and gave him his hand.

"You have done honestly by the Lady Fulvia and by me," he said. "Take me. I will bring no harm upon her who saved me and mine from destruction."

Fulvia stared at him, then broke into a storm of protest. But Ian was deaf to her pleading. Come what might, he could not involve her in the peril which threatened him. Hugo strove to soothe the excited girl, to calm Gui whose hand trembled on his sword-hilt, to quiet the passionate Heraclides who shrilled his anger with all the vehemence of his fiery little soul. At last the baron made himself heard and said reassuringly:

"Be not anxious, any of you. While the king is just now turned against Ian Dhu, there is a strong chance of his relenting. He is in a pleasant mood now, aside from this matter, for he expects a visit from the famous Cordovan sage, Achmed al-Mokhtar. Roger's love for men of learning is well known, especially for Spanish scholars. I will entreat al-Mokhtar to plead for Seignior Ian. The king will not deny a prayer from such a source."

Hawwas turned to him in astonishment.

"Achmed!" he repeated. "The greatest geographer and philosopher of the age? Truly Roger will refuse him nothing. His fame is great wherever learning is honored. But when did he land?"

"He is not yet here," Hugo answered. "His ship is a fortnight overdue. The court is most anxious about him."

Ian mused.

"Are you certain the king will grant anything a Moslem scholar may ask?"

Hugo laughed in relief.

"He would refuse masses for his mother's soul before he would deny a Moorish sage the half of his kingdom. Roger loves knowledge above all things, and this Spaniard is reputed the greatest scholar in the world."

"Has the king seen him before?" Ian asked.

"Never, though he has been striving for two years to induce Achmed to come hither."

Ian turned to Jaufré.

"Fetch Dugall Mor," he directed.

Dugall appeared immediately. Presenting him to Hugo, Ian asked—

"How does he look to you?"

Surveying the Highlander's immense proportions, his leonine head and regal carriage, the Norman answered:

"Like a barbarian emperor."

"You have said well!" Ian Dhu cried, his eyes alight with excited mirth. "Look you, Sir Hugo, I think I will play this game for myself. I am as dark as an Arab and not unlike one in feature, for I am a dark Pict. My people are either fair like Dugall or swarthy like me, and I am especially brown from the sun of Palestine. I speak Arabic. I will put on turban and burnoose and go with you to Palermo as Achmed al-Mokhtar. Dugall Mor will go with us to the king as Ian Dhu, and we shall say that al-Mokhtar, on his way to Sicily, was captured by the Berbers and rescued by Ian Dhu Mackay!

"Dugall, pretending to be myself, will thus appear as the deliverer of the king's guest—myself in disguise—from Almohade slavery. I, as Al-Mokhtar, will report to Roger the true story of the Berber attack on my ship and will pray him to treat the disguised Dugall with honor. Then, as soon as he has signed and sealed a full pardon and amnesty for us, I will throw off disguise and rely upon his justice!"

Hugo shook his head.

"It is full of flaws," he said. "The king will involve you in a scientific discussion as soon as you are presented to him as Achmed, and you will be caught

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in an ignorant reply, for Roger is no mean scholar. If you escape detection and get your pardon, it will not be safe for you to undeceive him. He would never forgive it. If you continue the masquerade, the arrival of the true Achmed will expose you and you will suffer the king's extreme rage. Nor do I myself believe that you could pass for a Moor, even for a moment. Your man would convince any one, as a Scottish prince, but you would be hopeless as a Moslem."

IAN seemed to accept this judgment. He became thoughtful, even morose. Then, suddenly, he clasped both hands to his side. His eyeballs rolled; he groaned horribly and swayed on his feet. In alarm, Fulvia hastened to him. Gui and Jaufré sprang to support him. Hawwas gazed at him in concern.

"Help me to my room!" he groaned. "I am sick to death! Hawwas, attend me!"

Gui and Jaufré would have raised him up, but, with a wild bellow, Dugall pushed them aside and picked his chief up as a child picks up a doll. Past the startled group he strode and up the stair to the chamber in the keep. Motioning to the others to remain, Fulvia hastened after the giant, the physician following as fast as his age permitted.

When Ian had been laid on his bed, Fulvia bent over him, her lovely face white. But Ian, feebly raising one hand, asked her in a faint voice to leave him with the physician. She went and Dugall also, though unwillingly.

When the door of the sick-chamber had been closed and Hawwas laid a hand on the sufferer's temple, Ian sat up in bed and laughed silently, enjoying the other's surprize.

"It was but a trick to speak with you alone," the Scot assured him. "They think I can not pass as a Moor. Can you find me a burnoose and turban, Hawwas? It must be large."

Recovering from his astonishment, the old man chuckled.

"Ibrahim, the village cadi, gave me many garments of the finest linen for curing him of a dropsy. They are too big for me. Wait!"

An hour later, a huge, black-bearded Moor, wearing a flowing white robe and swathed about the head in a voluminous tarboosh, stalked impressively through the bailey into the hall where Fulvia and the others still waited for Hawwas's report. Bowing low, the Moor introduced himself as the physician, Said Ulla, who had been sent for by his friend Ibn Hawwas to consult on a dangerous case of inflammation of the stomach. Gasping, Fulvia stared at him with frightened eyes. The Moor, however, disregarding her emotions, asked in Arabic—

"Where is the patient?"

Fulvia pointed to the stair leading to the keep. The Moor's path toward it led him past Dugall Mor, whom he jostled roughly. The touchy Highlander, his nerves already strained with anxiety for his chief, turned on him savagely, but the Moor, glaring back at him, hissed—

"Christian dog!" Then he strode on.

With a Gaelic oath, Dugall sprang at him, caught him by the shoulder and spun him around savagely. The Moor sneered, and on the instant Dugall drew his knife. Fending him off, the other spoke sharply in a tongue unknown to Fulvia. His knife slipping from his fingers, the Highlander backed off with open mouth. The Moor bowed mockingly to the company and said in French:

"You see, lady countess, and you, Lord Hugo, that I make an excellent Moslem. My own kinsman, Dugall Mor, who has attended me from childhood was about to stab me. If I can deceive him, may I not deceive Roger?"

"By the beard of St. John!" Hugo swore. "You have proved your case well! It is an evil joke for a faithful man to play on his king but, after all, I promised only that I would bring you to Roger. So long as you come, it matters not, so far as I can see, whether you come as Christian or Moslem, and, by the mass, you make a marvelous Moor!"

Gui, with all the Frenchman's perception of the humorous, suddenly burst out laughing at the bewildered expression on Dugall's face. But Fulvia did not laugh; her face suddenly became white and stern, and she turned upon Ian with eyes blazing scornfully.

"It is clever and will work," she said chokingly, "but you take a needless pleasure in torturing the feelings of your friends."

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CHAPTER V

THE SLEEPING LION

IT WAS a large cavalcade that rode out from the shadow of Rocca Forte on to the Palermo road next morning. Hugo had brought with him three hundred picked troops: fivescore Norman mounted men-at arms and twice as many archers and sappers.

"Here," he said proudly to the two Scots, "is the host that took Bari, Salerno and Benevento for Roger. I did you honor by bringing such men, though I thank God I did not have to use them."

No other baron in the land boasted such a retinue as Hugo, the King's Hammer. A master of siege-craft, he had gathered a force of engineers before whom not a castle in Sicily or Southern Italy could continue to stand. They had served in many a campaign under the king's banner, till now the barons knew better than to rebel, and there was peace.

Looking back to the grim tower of Rocca Forte, Hugo drew a deep breath of undisguised relief.

"I would not have harmed one of those stones," he cried, "for all the gold in Palermo!"

Then, seeing Ian was about to speak, he added in Arabic:

"Remember who you are, most noble Achmed. My men are honest lads—but all soldiers drink."

Thus reminded, the Scots were careful not to fall from their rôles. Nevertheless, Ian, whether as himself or as Achmed al-Mokhtar, was little inclined to be friendly. He could not quite forgive Hugo for the errand on which he had come.

But the ride was long, for Sicilian Summer days are hot and armored men ride slowly in time of peace. The languorous warmth, the green and brown-gold beauty of the landscape gradually drew from Ian's mind the keenness of his resentment, and the perfect good humor of the Norman compelled a response. By mid-afternoon they were conversing pleasantly. Hugo turned the talk into safe, professional channels.

"Since I first heard of your presence in our island, I have been burning with questions," he said. "You were at Lisbon and Damascus. I pray you, tell me—for I am an old provincial, out of the currents of the world—somewhat of your campaigns. Tell me—without forgetting your Cordovan wisdom—how those cities were attacked? Was much use made of moving towers, after the ancient style? What engines were employed?"

Understanding the caution, Ian answered as Achmed al-Mokhtar might have done:

"The methods you employ here," he said, "are doubtless those you learned from the Moslems and the Greeks. The Northern Franks—French, English and Germans—learned at the same school, but not so well. I have seen larger castles than Rocca Forte a thousand times, in Spain and in the East, but never one that was stronger than Rocca Forte. Therefore you have nothing to learn from Spain or Palestine."

Hugo looked disappointed and, after a moment, suggested—

"Let us ride ahead."

So he and the two Highlanders spurred on beyond the long, slow column until they were free to talk openly.

"I can see, from what you tell me, why the crusade failed," Hugo remarked. "If a place is strong and well-provisioned, the greatest armies will only wear themselves out against it."

"The crusade failed," Ian answered bitterly, "because those who went upon it forgot their God and turned their thoughts to plunder. Quarreling over the spoils they had not yet won, the vast hosts of the cross betrayed one another to its enemies."

Hugo cursed softly.

"And because the crusade failed," he said, "the Christian King of Sicily prepares to welcome one of the heroes of the cross to a prison, and a Moslem scholar to the splendors of his palace. If you can only maintain that disguise of yours! Luckily your Arabic has a Spanish accent, as the true Achmed's must."

"My teacher was a shipwrecked Granadan Moor," Ian explained. "I can even pose as a poet in that tongue, but the saints be my help if your king asks me any questions concerning science, for I am as ignorant of it as you are of Gaelic."

"He will ask many, never doubt it," Hugo answered soberly. "You would do well to prepare yourself for discovery."

The white road had been steadily

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ascending the long slopes of the Madonian Mountains till, at the end of twenty miles, they had climbed to a height of two thousand feet. The interminable groves of olive, orange and fig were left behind; they were now in the zone of wheat and grape. Ian gazed curiously at the sweeping slopes of ripening grain, alternating with vast vineyards, each vine carefully cut and pruned to the size of a small currant-bush. Such fertility, in a mountain region, astonished him.

Before them rose a monstrous ridge, its tallest peaks nearly six thousand feet high, where the road seemed to end. Then, outlined against the red sun, there leaped into view a V-shaped notch, cut deep into the mountain and bitten at the top by the frowning side of a squat tower.

"The Pass of Blood. Here I suffered my first and only defeat," said Hugo, laughing softly to himself.

"You take it gently," Ian remarked, scenting a tale.

"That is how she took me—gently."

"She? Who?"

"Fulvia."

Hugo laughed again at the surprize in his companion's eyes. As for Dugall Mor, he nearly fell out of his saddle.

"What! Beaten by a woman?"

"Aye," Hugo confessed, "as you would have been in my place. After her father's death, King Roger feared to leave so good a fief in a woman's hands during such troublous times as we have just been through. Rocca Forte is the key to Sicily; this pass ahead of us is the keyhole. There Roger wished to have a man, an iron-fisted soldier, on guard. Fulvia must marry. Never having seen her, I asked the king for her hand and estates. Roger consented. Fulvia defied me to come and take her with all my forces.

"I came and found a wedge-shaped wall built across the Pass of Blood, just the other side of the crest. What lay beyond was hidden from my scouts, for Fulvia's men held the hills above. There was no storming those crests, but the wall seemed ill-built for defense. I sapped and mined it in the most approved manner. Siege-craft is my business, but understanding women is not. That wall was a dam behind which were pent up the waters of a mountain lake.

"When my lads bored underneath, the water rushed out and after us down the pass. We could not reach the mouth of the pass in time. The only escape was up Aghlab's Stair—a cut in the mountainside barely wide enough for two to climb abreast and lined with Fulvia's men-at-arms. The flood was at our heels; we threw down our weapons and scrambled up the Stair.

"She held me as a hostage while I wrote to Roger that Fulvia needed no husband, myself least of all. Roger laughed and recognized her as Countess of Rocca Forte and Castrocavalli. Since then we have become the closest of friends, but I would not marry that red-haired lass for twenty castles!"

A queer look came into Ian's eyes.

"Yet she is fair and as gracious as she is brave," he said.

"She is that and more, but when she marries, her husband will cease to be his own master."

"What matters that when he will be master of the loveliest of women?"

Hugo stared at him.

"Already?" he observed dryly. "Others have thought that, but she has no master yet. No, Fulvia's husband will not master her. She has the spirit of an Apulian eagle. Besides—" and he laughed—"I doubt her willingness to marry a Moslem."

Ian's tarboosh and false beard concealed his embarrassment. He had not guessed he was revealing to the Norman what he had not yet admitted to himself. Hugo's answer disclosed with an abruptness that overwhelmed him that he, Ian Dhu, was thinking of Fulvia more than he had ever before thought about women.

THE shadow of the ridge fell upon them, and they rode into the jaws of the pass. Instantly, from the tower above, a voice rang out:

"Who comes? Stand!"

"Corleone, on the king's errand!" Hugo bellowed, and the voice, after a moment, indicating close surveillance from behind battlement and arrow-slot, replied—

"Pass, Corleone!"

The squadron rode on over the crest of the divide and down through the Pass of Blood, well named from the desperate battles which had been fought there for the possession of Sicily by ancient races now degenerated into peasants—Greeks,

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Carthaginians, Romans and, in later days, Byzantines, Saracens and Normans. For an interminable while the cavalcade descended into its gloom; then, emerging into a broad, open space, watered by a brook and still lighted by the red rays of the sinking sun, they halted for the night. Soon they were eating by the light of half a hundred fires. After the meal the weary troopers stretched themselves out by the fires, and soon, early as it was, all were asleep.

All but Ian. His mind was driven hither and thither between two battling thoughts: the thought of Fulvia, her beauty, her splendid spirit; and the thought of the danger and the adventure ahead. By his desperate venture, he had saved her from the peril of the king's wrath. If his scheme succeeded, he would come back to her and—But that was folly. He would not, could not stay on at Rocca Forte, however he succeeded, for once Roger learned his trick, the king would scarcely forgive either him or Fulvia. As soon as his men were healed, he must sail away, must go back to Scotland.

Scotland! The very thought of it had sustained him through toilsome, hopeless campaigns, through wounds and disaster, through sickness and the burning desert sun, through the endless privations and perils of the sea. But now, in some strange manner, it had lost the glow of its attraction. He had been bitterly homesick for Scotland, its mists, its heather, its craggy, dangerous coast with the wild hills behind. Now he seemed to care strangely little whether he returned or not. In this new land there was sunshine, adventure, Fulvia! Somehow all the sunshine, all the adventure, the mystery of an ancient land and the fascination of strange peoples—all seemed to be merged in Fulvia.

But before he came back to her, there were strange, unfathomable dangers in his path. He must enter a city, a court filled with Moslems, dominated by Moslems, ruled by a pro-Moslem king. There, among men who were what he pretended to be, he must pass for one of them. He must deceive them all. And he must deceive a monarch deeply learned in all the wisdom of the East. He, a wild, unlearned hillman, must match himself in the mysteries of Oriental lore with one to whom those mysteries were as a scroll unrolled. The prize of the game was a brief, uncertain safety. The hazard was death.

REACHING Corleone at noon the next day, Hugo stopped in his massive castle there, only long enough to eat and to give orders to his officers; then, leaving all the host save ten spearmen behind, they rode on toward Palermo.

Again the sun sank, many-hued, and as they reached a bend in the dusty road, a vision rose before them in splendor. Bathed in the limpid crimson light, a hundred domes and minarets stood rosy and golden in the shimmering distance. The lower half of the picture was cut off by the black bulk of an enormous wall, but above, the jeweled courts of heaven seemed to spread their multi-colored loveliness. Ian gasped; Dugall Mor rose in his stirrups, an elongated figure of wonder.

"Palermo," Hugo said briefly.

His Norman soul, steeped in the stern realities of armed camps, knew nothing of the elfin beauty of the scene.

Half an hour brought them to the wall, with its massive Moorish archway and ponderous iron gate. The guard challenged, but a word from Hugo admitted them past the turbaned spearmen in their Saracen mail. Now they were inside the city, the jewel of the south.

For a quarter of a mile they rode between rows of villas, marble Summer-houses with pointed arches and pillars that seemed lilies of stone. Each villa was bordered with flowering shrubs and surrounded with well-watered green lawns. Between them one could see water beyond and tall tufts of papyrus; behind that the huge wall towered.

The horsemen ascended a long, gradual rise between garden-set mansions till a second wall and gate halted them. Once more the Norman's word won them through, and then the magnificence of Palermo burst upon them. The street they followed, now thick with people, blazed with the colors of prismatic silks. Turbaned Moors, some with the green of the Hadj, mingled in the swirl of traffic with Jews, long-bearded and gabardined. Greeks in flowing robes sauntered in the way of plumed carriages, to the shouted wrath of the drivers; soldiers in gleaming mail strode proudly past in twos and threes. The horsemen

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picked their way with difficulty, till a tall Syrian officer, recognizing Hugo, shouted a hoarse command; then the crowd parted to let them by. The broad, straight street was lined with gorgeous shops, open-fronted, where merchants lounged in the cool, torchlit evening behind low stone counters in the dark entranceways.

Behind the shops, on both sides of the wide avenue, great buildings towered in majestic beauty. Spires, square towers, needle-like minarets and lofty domes mingled in harmonious confusion. Saracenic arches, miracles of lacy stone, alternated with gracefully flowered columns; the very walls were of marble, glowing above the cavern of the street with the last smoldering red of sunset. The city mounted all around, in tier on tier of storied, jeweled stone, and, at its feet, there flowed a ceaseless tide of picturesque humanity.

"The Galga," Hugo commented. "Beyond that wall ahead is the cathedral and the inner city, greater far than this. Here is the royal palace."

It rose at their right, a dream-palace in the soft after-glow. Immediately before them, as they turned, was a beetling rampart, studded with round, machicolated towers. Above and beyond the rampart it broke into a riot of delicate spires, of flowing arabesques, story on story of sheer loveliness springing from a grim, war-scarred base. They passed beneath an archway in the northeast tower and entered a great courtyard.

On three sides were colonnades with the same pointed arches and slender shafts; a fountain, guarded by stone lions, flowed into a great basin of limestone. Soldiers were everywhere—squatting on the pavement, leaning against the columns, clustered in the archways. As the baron and his companions passed, Ian looked for some recognition from the men-at-arms but, save for a nod from several officers, no attention was paid to them till they reached the southern end of the court. Here, a broad-shouldered Norman captain exchanged a brief conversation with Hugo, then stared with frank curiousity at Ian in his turban. Dugall, behind Ian, won more attention, for the officer surveyed him from head to foot and, at the sight of the seven-foot sword dangling across his back, cried aloud:

"Dieux des battailles! Quelle épée! Quel homme!"

Behind the colonnade, extending all round the court, were the barracks, armories and storehouses. Leading the way through a brick-walled apartment that glittered with arms and armor, Hugo conducted them down a corridor and into a suite of three large rooms.

"My quarters," he said. "Ho, knaves!"

Two men servants entered, unmailed their master and bathed the feet of the travelers with cool water and the pulp of lemons. Then the three sat down to a hearty meal at the end of which the Norman stretched his burly arms and said:

"The king will send for us soon now; the officer I spoke to in the court announced us."

It was so. Within a quarter of an hour a majordomo appeared, carrying an ivory wand of office. Him they followed down a second corridor and up a flight of veined-marble stairs, its balustrades gleaming in the torchlight like a spider's web in alabaster.

There they met, coming down, a slender, middle-aged man, with a pleasant, wrinkled face. His clean-shaven cheeks were ruddy with high living, yet he bore himself like a soldier till he came face to face with Ian. Then, suddenly, he cringed and bowed to his knees.

"Ha, Hugo!" he greeted. "Welcome, holy imam!"

"God make you honest, Christodoulos!" Hugo answered.

"With your leave, seigniors,"

The renegade bowed once more and passed them. Mounting the last of the stairs, they found themselves at one end of an enormous hall. It was dimly lighted, though a thousand draft-tossed points of flame seemed to flicker from wall and ceiling, even from the floor. Serried columns rose like an enchanted forest on all sides, supporting arches so graceful that they seemed to float. The walls were of finest marble, set with zones of bronze and plaques of gold; the floor was one glorious mosaic of tiny colored stones. The far end of the hall was hidden in shadow. A strange perfume filled the air.

"This is the earthly paradise," Hugo whispered in Ian's ear. "Christodoulos is its serpent. His brood is numerous—crafty Greeks, disloyal Moslems; but the king suspects not, for he sleeps."

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The majordomo led them forward for more than sixty yards. Suddenly, as if at the command of some wizard, a myriad colored lamps burst into flame, throwing into bold, clear prominence the tiniest detail of each mosaic and fresco. The whole place flashed.

Ian stopped in sheer surprize. For, at the end of the room which, but for themselves, had seemed empty of life, there apperared in the lamp-light a throng of men clustered about a raised dais. The men were clad in gorgeous silks or in gold-washed armor. A line of armed guards stood at rigid attention on either side of the dais, and, enthroned upon the dais itself, the center of the enchanted picture, sat a man of herculean build, broad of shoulder, lion-like of face, bearded, majestic as a Roman god. He was clad in a robe of crimson silk, embroidered skilfully in gold, crusted with gems. A golden tiara crowned his kingly head.

HE ROSE in silent dignity, slowly descended from the dais, and advanced to meet the little group. As he approached, his powerful face was softened by a glad smile.

"Well done, Hugo!" he said, his voice deep and resonant.

Then he took the disguised Ian's hand, shook it warmly and cried:

"Thrice welcome, Prince of Sages! Thrice welcome, al-Mokhtar, O Sun of Wisdom!"

As soon as Roger released his hand, Ian salaamed and replied:

"For thy most gracious words, thanks and blessings, O King of the Age! But in welcoming me, I pray you welcome also my friend and deliverer, Ian Dhu Mackay, Maormor of Moray, for he it was whose keen sword and valiant heart rescued me from Berber pirates. But for him, I should be sitting on a slave-bench instead of bathing in the glory of your magnificence!"

This was in the true flowery Moslem style, and Ian was relieved to see that it succeeded. The king, surprized, bent his brows on the gigantic figure of Dugall, ran his gaze over him searchingly, noted the Highlander's regal carriage, his mighty limbs and the long pommel of his sword sticking up over his left shoulder. Suddenly Roger's expression changed; from bewilderment it became gladness, and he clasped Dugall's hand.

"We had other reports of your affair, Prince of Moray," he said, "which caused us to give you some inconvenience. I rejoice to learn of our mistake and I thank you more than you can dream for the valorous act which brought the great Achmed safe to our presence. Instead of the anger we have felt for you, we offer you our deepest gratitude and beg your forgiveness."

This was said in Latin, as the fitting tongue for intercourse between two European princes. The king had spoken to Ian in Arabic. Understanding no Latin, Dugall, who was not lacking in shrewdness, answered in his halting Norman French. The king at once took the hint and continued the conversation in that tongue.

After a few questions concerning the fight with the Berbers, which Ian and Dugall answered as they had prearranged, Roger took the pretended Achmed's arm, led him to a divan beside the throne and made him sit. To Dugall he assigned a cushioned stool on his left hand, for, to Roger's mind, a Christian prince was not the equal of a Moslem sage.

One by one, the courtiers were presented to the distinguished guests: Thomas Brown, the King's Chancellor, a blond Englishman; Nilus Doxopatrus, a Greek, native of Palermo, orthodox priest and politician; and then the Moslems, who formed the greater portion of the group. Ali Hassan, a lean, bearded Arab, Senior Counselor of the Royal Curia, the supreme council of the realm, a man with a fine, honest face and monumental brow; Tufik, the Marshal; Ibn Abdallah, Captain of Archers; Abd-er-Rahman, noblest of Sicilian poets, though he composed only in his native Arabic. Him, Ian made happy by a compliment that was made doubly gracious by the mouth that uttered it:

"Your verses are not unknown to us in Spain; I have always thought highly of them."

"Praise from al-Mokhtar is honey of paradise," the flattered poet responded.

The king apologized for the absence of the Admiral, George of Antioch, and for Edrisi, the greatest of Sicilian geographers who was with the Admiral in Greece.

"Edrisi will be inconsolable at missing your visit," Roger declared. "But I will show you his great work which, if it meets your approval, will be perfect indeed."

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He dismissed his courtiers and led Ian out by a door to the left of the dais.

"It will give me pleasure if the Prince of Moray will accompany us," Roger added. "He is a traveler and his advice will be useful."

They found themselves in a sumptuous chamber off the throne-room, its costly hangings almost covered with charts and maps. Roger's favorite passion was geography. He led them to a huge half-globe of silver mounted on a massive stand in the middle of the chamber.

"This is the hemisphere made by Edrisi himself, showing all the countries of the earth," he explained. "It is the work of ten years and expresses the wisdom of the age. See how the seas and continents are etched upon its surface. Scan it well, learned Achmed, and give me your opinion of its worth."

Ian advanced to the silver hemisphere and gazed at it with grave attention. He was wholly ignorant of its nature, knowing nothing of geography beyond the actual borders of the lands through which he had traveled and the seas he had sailed. The map meant nothing to him, yet to betray ignorance meant death.

"Scotland!"

Scarce could Ian restrain himself from shouting aloud the beloved word when he saw it graven there in Arabic. Followed a sentence of descriptive text which he read carefully.

"O King of the Age," he announced, "the learned Edrisi has written fairly and well of all those lands which border on the Mediterranean and the East, but of Scotland he says, 'It has neither habitations, towns nor villages, but is a bleak wilderness devoid of folk.' Behold my deliverer here; he is a living proof that Scotland is inhabited."

"Aye," Dugall added in Arabic, moved by the Celtic instinct to twist fact into jest, "but Scotland has no habitations at all. The people live in caves. I myself, with all my men, lived for years in caverns on the seacoast."

Roger looked questioningly at Ian.

"Is this so, Achmed?" he inquired.

"It is so, O King."

"Then is Edrisi wrong. Thanks be to God Who brought so great a scholar to my court!"

Thereupon Roger turned the conversation to mathematics, but Ian dodged by relating an improvised tale about the Irish who, as men say, know no arithmetic beyond the number they can count upon the hairs of their arms. Therefore no two Irishmen have the same conception of numbers. The king was amazed.

WHEN he would have gone on, Ian violated all court procedure by declaring that he was weary with his long journey and begged to be allowed to seek his chamber. The king bowed assent and himself accompanied his guest to the northeast tower where a suite of rooms such as Ian had never before dreamed of awaited him. The Scottish prince, Roger declared, would be lodged in the next tower, but Ian implored that Dugall be lodged with him, avowing a great affection for the man who had saved him from the Berbers. He was surprized at the readiness with which Roger agreed. It seemed indeed impossible for him to refuse anything to so learned a man.

"He did not even require me to give up my sword," the giant marveled.

"So far, Roger justifies Hugo's declaration that he sleeps," Ian answered. "But we have not got our heads out of the sack yet."

"This bed is soft as pudding," Dugall grunted. "I shall not sleep here."

There came a knock at the door. Opening it, Ian saw the smiling face of Christodoulos, who beckoned him outside. He followed, wondering what the renegade might have to say.

"O Favored of Allah!" the Greek said humbly. "Is it indeed true that the Scottish prince rescued thee from the Berbers?"

"It is true."

"Thy wisdom hides itself from me," murmured Christodoulos, plainly puzzled over something. Ian scented intrigue and, though ignorant of the other's meaning, followed the lead he gave.

"Why should my wisdom reveal itself to the uninitiate?" he parried.

To his surprize, Christodoulos took this quite humbly as if he had expected it.

"Thou sayest wisely," he admitted, "but one of the initiated waits for thee. I will lead thee to him."

Mystified, Ian followed the renegade down the corridor into a rich apartment.

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"My lodgings," Christodoulos explained, closing the door behind Ian.

The Scotchman's hand went to the *skean-dhu* hidden under his burnoose. This was surely a trap.

Suddenly he started and half-drew the knife. A segment of the wall-panel was opening out and, from the secret cabinet thus disclosed, there stepped a man—a Berber. He was shrouded in black and girt with knife and simitar. Ian recognized him at once. It was the leader of that very band of fanatics who, in Palestine, had lured him into the fatal battle with the troops of Iconium. Grimly the Scot resolved that, trap or no trap, the Berber should not escape him this time.

The fanatic stood before him, gazed into his eyes and salaamed profoundly. Ian's heart leaped. His disguise was perfect. Even an agent of the Almohades, his enemy who had trailed him in the East, did not recognize him.

"Peace be to him who comes in the name of the Holy One!" the Berber murmured. "They who believe will meet thee at the Garden of Heart's Delight!"

Ian stared. The man must be mad, yet his words were those of one who knows what he is about. Once more the Scot decided to follow the lead given him, however blindly. At least, if he followed, and kept on following, he might find the clue to the mystery in which this Berber and Christodoulos seemed involved.

"I come," he answered. "The time? Who shall be my guide?"

"The time is now," the Almohade answered. "Christodoulos will conduct thee."

He stepped back into the recess, closed the panel and disappeared. Ian turned, opened the door and came face to face with Christodoulos.

"Is it well?" the renegade asked eagerly.

"It is well. Conduct me."

The Greek led him through a bewildering maze of corridors, passages and chambers, down a flight of stairs and up to what appeared to be the blank wall of a tower. But here, too, there was a concealed recess with a stair beyond built into the wall. At last they emerged into the cool night at the foot of the south wall of the palace.

They passed unchallenged through a guarded gate in the wall of the *kasr*, or inner city, to the east, and turned down a cross-street. Half-way down this, Christodoulos looked about him cautiously and dodged into an alley. It was crooked, dirty and reeking with assorted Oriental stinks. A few steps brought them to a mosque, but the renegade led Ian past it into a second, broader street and down this to a square that even in the night darkness conveyed an impression of decayed glory. It was lined with great buildings, some domed, some castellated.

"The ancient city of the ameers," Christodoulos said. "We are almost there."

Crossing the square, they stopped before a rambling structure of polished stone, entered an arched doorway and waited. Christodoulos knocked five times, slowly. The door swung open. They entered, but Ian's dazzled eyes could not see who admitted them. The passage before them blazed with light and swam with a poignant perfume.

"Be pleased to advance," the renegade urged. "Roger is king in Sicily, but Allah rules here. That which is said in this place reaches only faithful ears; the lion hears it not, for he sleeps."

CHAPTER VI

IN THE GARDEN OF HEART'S DELIGHT

AT THE end of the passage two huge Nubians sprang toward them with drawn simitars. The negroes, obviously slaves, were naked to the waist, their faces hideous with menace, but recognizing Christodoulos, they fell back, one on each side of the massive door, and let the visitors pass.

"All is prepared, as you see," the Greek whispered in Ian's ear. "This place is usually open to all, but tonight Zobeida receives only the faithful, in honor of your coming."

The room which they now entered was so large that the thirty or forty men gathered within it seemed to emphasize rather than fill its vastness. Its walls, wherever the light caught them, flashed back the blue tints of lapis lazuli in a setting of creamy Parian marble; the hangings were soft-toned rugs from Mesopotamian looms. Scores of magnificent bronze lamps swung between Moorish pillars under arches that swept like the limbs of a marble

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forest to the gilded ceiling. Here and there, under the lamps, stood richly carved tables beside cushioned divans.

"You should see it on an ordinary night," Christodoulos remarked as he noticed his companion's admiration. "These tables are all heaped with gold and silver vessels, with luscious fruits, cool sherbets and tempting delicacies. See, only four are set tonight. But let us go forward, for we are expected."

As the two approached, the men awaiting them who had gathered into knots and clusters, ceased their half-audible conversation, drew together and surveyed them. Their glances, at first suspicious, became assured, as if relieved of some harassing dread. Yet they appeared, in the midst of their relief, somewhat awed and timid. Eying them in his turn, Ian recognized a slender, graceful man on the left of the nearest group—Abd-er-Rahman, the king's poet. All were Moslems.

"Ye who believe," announced Christodoulos, "I bring you him who was sent."

To Ian's amazement, every man present salaamed low before him with a reverence that all Achmed's wisdom could scarce explain. The mystery which had been gathering round him ever since the king left his chamber surrounded him with its presence, crowding in closer upon him. Whatever these strange things might mean, there was a hint of danger lurking beneath them, and the Scot was conscious that he was alone in the presence of nearly two-score armed men.

But, preserving his calmness as well as he could, he did that which seemed the natural thing. He answered as the real Achmed al-Mokhtar might have in his place, for there seemed little doubt that the reception which so puzzled him would have been expected by the man he impersonated. Therefore he looked the gathering over coolly, stroked his beard and spoke—

"From him who sent me, I bring greetings and the blessing of Allah upon the faithful."

It was clearly the reply expected of him. A buzz of low voices followed, then silence as the Greek introduced him to the waiting men. They were mostly native alcaides from the west coast, Palermitan Moors of princely houses, still boasting the now empty title of ameer, or wealthy merchants. To each, as he presented them, Christodoulos gave his full name, rank and occupation. Most of them bore themselves as men engaged in a desperate enterprise, furtive, suspicious of everything. To each, Ian spoke pleasantly in the flowery phrases of Arab courtesy; yet even as he spoke, his eyes roved about for some face, some sign, however trivial, that might suggest to him how to go on with this strange business.

At last it came. His eye was suddenly caught by the flash of light on steel, and, turning, he saw the negroes on guard barring the way to some newcomer. A word, and they withdrew again. A tall, strong y built man entered, robed in black. Ian re ognized him at once as the Berber who had startled him in the palace. He came straight to Ian, bowed low and addressed the company.

"Since my Lord Achmed is come," he said, "the entertainment need wait no longer. This way, Favored One of Allah!"

And, followed by the entire company, the Berber led him to an archway in the farther wall. As they reached it, lights were kindled on the other side of the arch. There came the sound of plashing water and the heavy odor of flowers borne on a cool breeze, and they entered a great garden.

It was really an open court, but its size was such and its walls so lost beyond the rays of the lamps, that it seemed limitless. The lamps were strung close together on silken cords, about ten feet above the smooth turf, emitting a soft, rich light through the many tiny interstices of their metal sides. Flowers were everywhere, crushed underfoot, draping the lamp-cords between the lights, growing thick on bushes of all heights. Here and there were plane-trees with rose-vines in full flower trained about them.

The plashing of water grew louder, and gazing through the trees and blossoms, Ian saw a great fountain in the center of the garden. It was in reality many fountains in one, spurting a myriad jets into the air where they were caught and turned into rainbows by the lamplight, to descend again and mingle in a wide marble basin. The gleaming spray rose and drooped like the fronds of some fairy forest of crystal. A soft sound of music came from somewhere, yet, save for the men with him, Ian saw no one.

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THEN, of a sudden, the music grew loud and harsh; and he recognized the sound of rebabs and lightly beaten nakers, the familiar instruments of the East. It rose and swelled, pulsing with a martial rhythm. Then, rushing upon them as if blown by wind, a crowd of girls swirled into the court among the flowers. Tall, slender Persians, delicate-featured Arabs, dark Moors, graceful Andalusians, they swayed into the rhythm of a choral posture-dance.

In and out among the flowers they whirled and eddied, their bare arms flashing and weaving, their transparent draperies blown about as if by light breezes. And ever, advancing and retreating in the garden, they came nearer and nearer to the fountain. They came and went in the light like shadows suddenly assuming life; they faded into the shadows like ghosts, to emerge once more in swaying beauty. The assembled men shouted and clapped their hands, drawing nearer to the plashing water. Ian went with them, keeping close by the Berber, in whom he recognized the leading spirit of the strange adventure. It was like the Moslem paradise with its lights, its music, its flowers and its dancing women.

Now they were at the fountain's edge, the dancing-girls on the other side of the spurting streams. They gathered, closed together like a bevy of water-sprites, and a light glowed from the center of the fountain where the jets rising from the marble edges left a space between.

The swirling group of women parted and, from their midst, there sprang a girl of surpassing beauty clad only in a thin veil and the luxuriance of her black hair in which a blood-red jewel gleamed. She poised gracefully and leaped into the fountain. In and out she danced between the spurts of gem-like drops, half-concealed, half-revealed by the glow of the light behind her through the water, stepping faster and faster to the accelerated pulsing of the music. The men watched her breathlessly.

Suddenly she leaped out and stood swaying and dripping before them. Ian gasped as she sprang before him, her arms outstretched in a sustained pose, her liquid eyes looking full into his. There could be no mistake. It was Gulnar, the vanished Sultana of Iconium!

She dropped on her knees before him, her lovely face turned up to his. He knew her at once; her features had undergone no change since she had visited him with her husband in his honorable captivity. Did she recognize him? For it was plain that the evening's splendor was not for Ian Dhu, the crusader, but for Achmed al-Mokhtar, and that Achmed was something more than a mere scholar on a visit to the king. How much more was he? Who were the "faithful" who did him honor here? How far could Ian carry out his deceit and effect his purpose of solving the mystery? What would happen if Gulnar should recognize him and cry out his name?

But, if she recognized him, she gave no hint of it. Plucking up courage, he drew from beneath his burnoose a purse of soft Cordovan leather and tossed it upon the girl's knees. It would have been an insult to the sultana. It was an expected tribute to the dancing-girl. With a ravishing smile she bounded up and sprang back into the fountain. The lights within winked out one by one; shadowy forms stole in and extinguished the other lights, and the dancing-girls went out in the dimness like spirits of flowers. Only a few lamps still burned.

A stir rose from the group of men, the rustle of garments, the soft expulsion of breath. They rose and slowly, as if still under the garden's enchantment, they moved toward the archway. Ian would have followed but a hand on his arm restrained him. Vaguely he saw, in the half-gloom, that perhaps a dozen men remained behind.

"Those who depart are the new converts," the Berber's voice explained. "The initiate alone attend you."

The light went out beyond the archway and the Berber rose, his fingers hooked in Ian's arm. They moved toward the end of the garden, around shadowy hedges, between tall ghosts of trees, toward the black gloom of the rear wall. Behind them Ian could see, as he turned, the slow-moving forms of the dozen who followed. Between close-set rows of shrubs, tall as a man, the Berber led them till they were almost hidden among the plants in an angle of the wall. There came the sound of scraping, a screech of metal and against the darkness of the grass a blacker darkness yawned.

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"This way," the guide admonished. "Beware of the steps."

They descended a dark, warm cavern by stone steps that dripped with moisture. After them shuffled other feet and the creak of hinges sounded behind. The trap-door was shut. Whatever lay beyond, whether the solution of the mystery or death, there was now no turning back.

For minutes that seemed like hours they felt their way along the oozing limestone walls, around corners and curved bastions of rock. At last a twinkling point of light showed ahead. By its growing light they walked faster, down a long corridor of width sufficient to drive a two-horse chariot. By what forgotten race, in what bygone time of Sicily's bloody history this crypt was hewn from the native rock, no man then could tell.

It broadened now, and soon a great round arch closed with solid iron gates loomed before them. The Berber struck five times upon the metal with his dagger-hilt; the doors swung open and a rush of light and voices burst upon them. When his eyes adjusted themselves to the blaze of many torches, Ian found himself in a mighty rock chamber, in the presence of more than two hundred Moors. Fierce-eyed, black-bearded men, they gazed upon him with what seemed hunger in their eyes. He felt for his knife but his hand dropped, for suddenly the multitude fell prone before him with a great cry:

"Hail! Hail to him who comes in the name of the Mahdi!"

CHAPTER VII

THEY WHO BELIEVE

BETWEEN the prostrate ranks the Scot advanced, his guide gently impelling him forward. Against the rear wall of the chamber, a throne-like bench of stone jutted out, its seat covered with cushions. Ian understood that he was expected to seat himself upon this, and sit he did, the Berber standing at his side. When he was seated, squatting Moorish-fashion, the Berber cried in a singsong voice:

"*Allah Allahu il-Allah!* There is no God save God! Mohammed is the prophet of God, but neither angels, afrits, saints, nor prophets exist save by the breath of Allah, the One and Indivisible! There is no God save God, and the Mahdi is the Sword of God!"

A deep-toned chanting rose from the many throats in the cavern, and Ian felt a curious sense of the power in the words and the answering chant. Danger too was present, lurking in two hundred scabbards, but danger to himself seemed insignificant now. He thrilled to two emotions: the laboring power of the words of faith, and the feeling that here, before him, surrounding him, was the heart of an organization hostile to himself and hostile to Sicily. For, as the Berber intoned his profession of belief, there flashed across Ian's memory the words of Hawwas:

"He preached that Allah is one and indivisible; that His attributes do not exist apart from Himself. Abd-el-Mumin calls himself the Mahdi!"

The throng was on its feet again, facing him now, their eyes blazing with that same hungry glare which had disturbed him when he entered. He recognized it now for the fervor of the fanatic; these were followers of the veiled Mahdi—Almohades! If they discovered his masquerade, if he fell from his rôle for an instant——

"Achmed al-Mokhtar, Prince of Sages and right hand of the Holy One, has brought us the word," the Berber addressed them. "Will ye hear him?"

"We hear!" they cried in chorus, and the Berber, stepping aside, left Ian to the task of improvising a message from the Mahdi. Rising, he faced them and stroked his beard slowly to gain time for thought. His black eyes roved over their faces, fixing now one, now another with a glance beneath which, not guessing the imposture, they trembled. His mind worked fast, considering how to begin, rejecting one possibility after another. He must speak as Achmed would speak; and how was that?

At last he opened his lips.

"Ye who believe!" he cried, his resonant voice filling the cavern. "I come with a message and with an order. Before ye hear the message, ye must obey the Holy One's command!"

A shiver passed over the multitude, a shiver of fear. Not fear of physical death, for their faith and oath bound them to ignore danger, but fear of the unknown spiritual power behind the dread name of the Mahdi. He ordered their bodies and disposed of their souls at his will.

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"The Holy One, anxious for his flock in Sicily, sends me to examine it," Ian continued. "He demands a full report of all that ye have done, the converts ye have made, your progress in undermining the Christian dog who sits on the throne and misrules your perverted brethren! Speak! How have ye obeyed his bidding? Wo to you if you have failed!"

By the silent awe with which they took his questions, Ian knew that he had followed the right lead. The Mahdi, through his messenger, would ask these very things, would demand information concerning the progress of his plot in the island. By the undoubting fervor of his audience he realized not only that the wise Achmed, who was to visit Roger on an ostensibly innocent scholar's errand, was the Mahdi's agent, but that he must be of higher rank in the Almohade order than any Moslem there. "The right hand of the Holy One!"

His Berber guide came forward to answer.

"I, Ibn at-Timnah, will answer for Palermo," he said. "Landing two months ago, I found in this great city but four of the faith. Three of these are here tonight; the fourth is dead, slain by Christian swords. Of that I shall speak again. The three surviving will account tonight for the districts of Messina, Girgenti and Catania.

"Now more than three thousand own our creed in Palermo alone, most of them men who have borne arms. The converts have contributed six thousand bezants, weapons without number and much valuable information. We have not yet used poison or the dagger, for to do that might warn Roger of our presence in his land which he does not yet suspect. Abu Abdallah, tell what thou hast done!"

A bent and wasted figure in the front of the assembly stepped borward, bowed to Ian and began:

"Two thousand and five hundred Moslem peasants of Catania are secretly pledged to the faith. All are good swordsmen. They have not contributed much coin, for they are poor, but they yearn to bathe their blades in Christian blood."

Following Abdallah, two more gave testimony, the two Ibn at-Timnah had mentioned. Ian complimented them but added in a scathing voice:

"Though ye have done well in many things, ye have played the fool in one. Commanded by the Mahdi to slay that Scottish dog, Ian Dhu Mackay, ye botched the task and your hired knaves laid hands on me, the emissary of the Holy One! Yea, but for this same Scot, I would now be tugging at an oar for Africans whose zeal swallows their wits! Know then, that I have taken this affair in hand and will settle it myself. I command you: Lay not a hand on the crusader, plot not against him nor against the Lady of Rocca Forte! Leave them to me. I will lead them into a pit of their own digging and so deal with them that the Mahdi shall be content.

"Now heed my commands, for they come from the Holy One. Do not strike yet; ye have worked well, but the time is not ripe. All told, ye have not won ten thousand men to our banner; we must have twenty thousand before we move openly. Spread the Faith, toil with all your might, but slay not. Move softly; the hour will come in due season."

THERE was good reason for these words. In the first place Ian now understood the surprize of Christodoulos when he had assured the Greek that the Scots, with Fulvia's aid, had saved him, the Mahdi's emissary, from the misplaced zeal of the Berbers. By now, he knew, not an Almohade in Palermo but had heard the story and marveled why he, having traveled all the way from Rocca Forte with the supposed Ian Dhu, had not carried out the Mahdi's vengeance.

He realized, too, that at any moment, unless he warned them off, they would find their way into the palace and attempt to finish what Mahmud had left undone in Rocca Forte. It was fairly certain, since Dugall had passed for his chief so far, without detection, that the Almohades here in Sicily were not the same as those who had persecuted him in Palestine—except, of course, for Ibn at-Timnah—but other agents of the same dreaded master.

Mahmud could not have been the only spy in Rocca Forte, for there must have been others who brought the report of the sea-battle to Palermo and lodged accusation against the Scots. But they must have all left the castle immediately after the fight, else Dugall's masquerade as Ian would have been discovered and Ian's own part in the deceit exposed.

Ian saw that his words had the desired

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effect. The Almohades were completely befooled, cowed and would obey his orders blindly. This was well; it would save Dugall from molestation and would prevent the conspirators from taking action, for a time at least, against Roger. But he must find out how far they had carried their plans, what details had already been provided for and when they had intended to begin active operations.

Therefore he began to question them individually, summoning a man here and another there from the assembly, demanding from each what he had done for the cause. He discovered that the plot was much further advanced than he had dreamed.

Fearless in their fanaticism, they had planned to attack within the week, to murder the king through their agents in the palace and to assassinate at the same time all officers of the council except Christodoulos, who would then be in line for command of the army, largely composed of loyal Sicilian Moslems. The Greek, whom they had bribed, would lead out the Sicilian forces, lure them into an Almohade ambuscade in the mountains and hand them over to slaughter.

Spies in the households of almost every Norman baron, on an appointed day, were to assassinate their Christian masters. A *jehad* would be proclaimed as soon as the King was dead, with the object of massacring as many of the Christians and the orthodox Moslems as possible. A Berber fleet from the African coast would cooperate in the uprising.

When he had learned all that was possible, Ian turned savagely on the gathering.

"What!" he cried. "With George of Antioch on the way hither with his thousand ships? He would be upon you before your *jehad* was under way, hurl his troops upon you and break you in pieces! Fools! Ye would have ruined all. There must be no revolt on the island till the admiral is back. We must wait till he returns, scatter seeds of discontent among his crews and then slay him and his officers. Move carefully! Strike not till I give the word!"

They took the rebuke like whipped dogs, and Ian's fierce eyes, lashing their spirits, roved from one face to another till they cowered before him. All, that is, save two: in the foremost rank a tall, muscular Arab in splendid mail gazed at him unabashed with a slight smile curling his bearded lips; and in the rear one who had come late, during the Scot's final words, stood with upturned face, his eyes hot with an anger that Ian could not comprehend. This second man was a meager little Moor, meanly dressed. Their expressions troubled the supposed emissary; he scented disbelief and disbelief meant danger, perhaps discovery. But he fronted them with calm, imposing dignity, waiting for the slightest sign of opposition.

It came, sudden and savage. The little Moor, shaking his fists at Ian, broke into a howl of rage that brought the crowd round to face him with surprized resentment. Two men near him laid hands upon him, but he struggled frantically and cried out:

"Kill him! Kill the impostor!"

With the fury of a hurricane, they surged upon the Moor, whipping their simitars from the scabbards. The whole assemblage had but one thought: To hack in pieces the wretch who dared blaspheme the sacred person of the Mahdi's emissary. But, fighting so fiercely that he forced the persons of his captors for a moment between him and the avenging blades, he shouted:

"That man is not the Mahdi's agent! He is some enemy in disguise! I know, for I am a Spaniard and have often seen Achmed al-Mokhtar!"

The fanatics stopped in their tracks, their blades sinking. Their faces were distorted with confused horror. Living, as they did, in the dread of daily discovery, the mere suggestion that he who posed as one high in their counsels was an impostor struck them like a thunderbolt. The Moor improved the opportunity.

"For three years I was a barber in al-Mokhtar's service," he cried. "I know his face as I know my own, and this man is not he! He has deceived you, learned our plans and will betray us all if he leaves this place alive! Kill, in Allah's name!"

The Almohades turned bewildered faces to Ian. The sudden revelation was too much for them; they could not absorb it, could not adjust their shaken minds. Their weapons still gleamed in their hands, they lusted for blood, but they were not yet certain whose. If the assumed al-Mokhtar were an impostor, he must die; but if the Moor lied, then the vilest of deaths must erase him from the earth. Ian seized the occasion to reassert his mastery.

"I did not seek you out," he reminded

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them. "Ibn at-Timnah brought me to you. His faith and mine stand challenged by the word of a barber! The dog lies! He was my barber, as he says, but he delivered to the Christians a letter I sent by him to the Mahdi and fled then from Spain. Let him be punished!"

"He deceives you!" the Moor screamed back. "If he is what he claims to be, why did he take the Scot, the Mahdi's enemy, under his protection? Why does he command us to abandon the fruit of our long planning, our toilsome work in Sicily? Why does he forbid us to slay the tyrant Roger? Let him answer!"

"I have given reason enough," Ian answered steadily.

ON THE instant he realized that his prestige had slipped from him. The barber's last question raised in their fanatic minds doubts that Ian's plausible reasons had not quite allayed. Their eyes began to burn into his, their hands tightened on their hilts.

Then rescue came and from a source unforeseen. The gorgeously armored Arab who had smiled at him stepped commandingly before the menacing conspirators, raised a hand for silence and said coolly:

"Ye are fools to listen to that madman, that worse than traitor. Ye all know me and trust me, for I have been one of you since at-Timnah first sowed the seeds of the faith in Palermo. I have traveled in Spain, as you all know well, and at the court of Cordova I met this man before you, Achmed al-Mokhtar. I was presented by him to the Holy One himself, the Mahdi, the Veiled. By the unity of Allah, I swear that this is he!"

Ibn at-Timnah, who had been staring all the while at Ian as if to rouse some half-forgotten memory, turned to the speaker and bowed in reverence.

"We trust you indeed, Khaled ben-Zobair, for we know your devotion. He who has seen the Mahdi is to be believed. Forgive us, noble Achmed, for our doubt, but none of us had seen you before tonight, and they who live in peril must be wary."

With a leap he was among the crowd, elbowing throught them, his simitar flashing. They gave way before him till he faced the frenzied Moor.

"Take the reward of traitors!" the Berber thundered, and the barber's turbaned head rolled to the stony floor.

The astonished Ian stared at Khaled, bewildered at the glib lie that had saved him, and the soldier smiled back at him. When the tumult had been quieted, Khaled addressed his fellow conspirators:

"Ye who believe," he said, "have not yet been asked for an accounting of my labors in the cause, doubtless because al-Mokhtar wished to consult apart with me. As captain of Roger's palace guard, I have been able to do more, to make more powerful converts than any among you, save at-Timnah alone. I have much to report, but it can not be said openly. If ye consent, therefore, and if he who is sent permits it, we should do well to separate for the night, that I may deliver my account in secret."

Still confused but realizing the danger that might arise if the session were prolonged, Ian made a gesture of assent. The Almohades, too disturbed by what had passed to regain full confidence, moved toward the door and faded into the tunnel. Silently the Captain Khaled approached Ian and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"If it please you, learned Achmed," he proposed, "to accept my company, I will attend you to the palace. It is near dawn and you must not be missed by the king."

Rising, Ian followed him.

For perhaps five minutes they continued down the crypt by which they had come; then, unseen by the others ahead, Khaled drew his companion to the left side of the tunnel and into the blackness of an invisible opening.

"This way," he whispered.

Almost instantly they were cut off from the sound of shuffling feet in the main tunnel. Black darkness was all about them. After an eternity of groping, they felt the wall cease suddenly, and the Arab plucked Ian back.

"Here the passage ends," he announced. "At your feet lies a sheer plunge into an unfathomed pool. To the right there are steps cut in the face of the stone, invisible even by torchlight to any in the passage. Move not."

The hair on Ian's neck lifted. For a moment he was convinced that the Moslem plotted his destruction. He felt for his dagger, but the saving thought that if Khaled wished his death, he need only have kept silence before the Almohades, stayed his hand. He waited, retaining his hold on the captain's arm.

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"Let me go!" Khaled whispered. Wrenching away, he struck two substances together that gave a metallic sound, and sparks flashed in the cavern. The fire from the flint and steel caught something white which flared with an acrid smell of alcohol, and the burning cloth kindled a short torch-end. He swung it high, revealing a yawning void before them, drew the torch to the right, lighting up the abrupt corner of the wall, and set one foot on a low projecting ledge at the angle. With one hand on the rocky corner, he swung himself round the face of the wall, mounted by the unseen steps, and lowered his torch for Ian to follow. In the outward face of the rock, invisible from the cave as he had said, well-cut stairs rose sheer above the depths. Gathering his burnoose about his waist, Ian mounted after him.

He was determined now not to let the Moslem return to his side or slip behind him. He drew his knife as he watched Khaled enter a cavity in the rock twenty feet above the passage leading to the meeting-place. When Ian himself reached this point, he watched for the smallest sign of treachery, but Khaled walked before him down a second passage running in the same direction as the main tunnel, though one level higher, and there was no indication of ill-will. After a few moments he stopped and faced the Scot.

"YOU do not trust me," he smiled.

Ian parried with a question.

"Are you an Almohade?"

"No more than you," the Arab answered quietly. "I have joined them and played their game, but for good reasons. As you have seen, they do not doubt me, but though I have been in their counsels and privy to their plots from the first, I am with them only to betray them when I have learned enough. Thanks to you, they have told more tonight than I ever heard them whisper before. That cunning Berber, Ibn at-Timnah, is the soul of the uprising and has never allowed his district officers to report to the full council of the order—only to him in secret. Your pose as emissary of the Mahdi broke down his guard.

"The true Achmed, long expected and mysteriously delayed, was to receive complete accounting of all that had been done and deliver the Mahdi's final orders. Roger, of course, knew nothing of this and would not believe that there was an Almohade in Sicily. He invited Achmed to his court out of sheer reverence for the Spaniard's great learning. You played the part well and obtained for me enough evidence to arrest every Almohade in Palermo. I shall do so at the proper moment, but first I must catch them in some overt act, else Roger will not believe. He is hard to convince."

"In the name of God who are you?" Ian cried, but the Arab only answered:

"An honest Moslem and a true Sicilian. Come! We must reach your chambers before your absence is discovered."

For some minutes they strode on through the winding crypt which Ian believed must be little below the level of the streets outside. His guess soon proved correct, for, stopping before an iron-bound door of olive-wood, Khaled unlocked it with a great brazen key and ushered the Scot into what seemed the cellar of a private dwelling. The stone-work was thick, damp and very old; the roof-beams were upheld by enormous limestone pillars.

"I have never before used this passage to return from the meetings," Khaled explained, "though I discovered it long since. I do not think any other knows of it. We are in the *kemonia*, a suburb close to the *galga*, and once inhabited by the Greek colony. This house, which is within an arrow-shot of the palace, is older than any man knows. It may have stood since the days of the Roman Cæsars. Untenanted for years, it has been very useful to me since I found the passage. I have bought it in the name of a wealthy and loyal Italian merchant."

Leading the way up dusty stone stairs and through a deserted atrium, he guided Ian out through the main door into the street. A few steps along the pavement, from which they could see the white walls of the palace gleaming faintly in the first gray of dawn, brought them to a bridge across a sluggish stream that bordered the street and, crossing the bridge, they came to the foot of the southeast palace tower.

The guard admitted them without question at the sight of their captain. Ever on the alert for chance passers-by—for the army of servants in the palace would soon be up—Khaled conducted his companion the entire length of the great building to Ian's own apartments. At the door he stopped and, smiling inscrutably, said:

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"Now, if you will admit me, I have much to say to you. I know your quarters well; no others open off from them, and the walls are sound-proof."

Closing the door behind them, Ian came face to face with Dugall Mor. The Highlander was in full mail, and armed with his great sword. As Ian entered, Dugall's face beamed with sudden joy.

"By Saint Brighid!" he swore. "I was about to go forth and comb the city for you. You have been gone long!"

"A little longer and I might never have returned," Ian answered.

Briefly he sketched the events of the night while Dugall stared alternately at him and at Khaled. When he heard how the Arab had saved his chief from discovery, he wrung the captain's hand with terrible gratitude. Ian, also, now that he could safely do so, expressed his thanks in strong terms.

Khaled laughed.

"I did it not for you but for the king," he answered, "though I rejoice for your sake also—Ian Dhu Mackay!"

Both the Scots started in amazement.

"How knew you?" Ian exclaimed.

"IT IS simple for one not blinded by the mists of fanaticism. But for their certainty that you were Achmed, the Almohades themselves could hardly have been deceived. True, you look like a Spanish Moor and speak like one, but you left a plain trail behind you.

"You came here with Hugo the Hammer, on friendly terms with a man who proclaimed himself the Maormor of Moray. The account you gave of the sea-fight with the Berbers was plausible, admitting that they would have made the mistake of attacking the Mahdi's emissary. That was the weak spot.

"To the court which—save for the Mahdi's secret agents—know nothing of the Almohades, it was convincing enough. Even the Almohades swallowed it, thinking that you had some reason for what they saw was an absurd story. The Berber pirates, of course, were Almohades themselves. The conspirators here expected an explanation, which you gave them and they accepted. For, so perfect is your disguise and bearing, so thoroughly did you look and act the expected Achmed, that anything you said was believed. For a moment I was taken in myself.

"Then that little Moor detected your fraud. He was telling the truth, of course, that was easy to see. The conspirators were on the point of seeing it when I interfered. I have never seen the Mahdi and of course I have never seen Achmed, but as soon as the Moor convinced me that you were not he, I knew that you must be Ian Dhu. Who else would have come all the way to Palermo—and from Rocca Forte where Ian was supposed to be—with your Scottish giant here?

"I was sure of you, but as soon as I laid my hand on your shoulder in the cavern, I knew beyond question. Those muscles—" he brushed his fingers over Ian's upper arm and shoulder—"do not grow about the Mediterranean. Only one thing could develop them—the use of such a sword as your man Dugall has just laid across that chest.

"You had drawn from the Almohades information that I joined them to gain but had never learned, though they accepted me unquestioningly. The king would never listen to my warnings against them. Your coming has put into my hands the means of blocking them before they strike."

Ian's eyes held his.

"Once more," he asked. "Who are you? captain of the palace guard, yes—but you are something more. I have seen palace guards all over the Orient and know them and their officers for useless ornaments."

"That, of course, is a blind," Khaled answered, "devised by the king to conceal my real activities. I am Vizier of the Divan of Secret Police."

"And the Almohades know it not?"

"None know it save my own force. It is large—a thousand men—but carefully selected from the most faithful and silent Moslems. We never leave a trace. Those whom we arrest disappear. Our very existence is still unknown."

"Then why," Ian demanded bluntly, "do you tell me?"

"Because I know you will keep silence and because I see in you a useful ally. I and my police are the only power in Sicily which can check the Almohades; the only organization as secret, yes, more secret than they. My men are scattered through their city and district groups and report what is said in their meetings. They and we are two strong underground streams meeting and pushing against each other. They have been too shrewd, too strong for us, though

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by ever so little. Now you come, deceive them, hold them off, extract evidence from them. With what I learned tonight I can make arrests, as many as I choose, when I please. But the time is not ripe. When it comes, you will help me."

"But if the true al-Mokhtar should come tomorrow?" Ian objected. "I should be unmasked, thrown in prison. The Almohade would learn from his agents how you lied to save me, and you would be discredited. Your very life would be endangered. Poison or the knife would dispose of us all; the conspiracy would burst out in all its strength. What could you or I accomplish, once the Almohades know the truth?"

"We shall chance Achmed's coming," Khaled replied. "We can do nothing else. But if he comes I shall know it as soon as he sets foot on Sicilian soil. You will disappear. I can guide you out of palace and city so secretly that none will guess where you have gone. You will ride to Rocca Forte as fast as horses can carry you and hold the castle with your men and those of the countess, till I send word.

"In the mean time I will deal with Achmed here, if he comes. He will go to the cavern with me; my men will mingle with the faithful. At a signal from me, a dozen of the police will seize Achmed himself and, from the side passage I showed you tonight, a thousand armored men will rush the cavern. All will be over in a moment.

"Then Roger himself will come, in response to an urgent message from me. One of my men will guide him. I will confront him with the plotters caught in their treachery; I will show him the learned al-Mokhtar, a proved Almohade agent. After that it should be easy to persuade him to pardon you."

"Well planned!" Ian exclaimed. "But how shall I help you?"

"The conspiracy will not be crushed by the execution of its leaders here. The first failure will only force the Mahdi's hand. He will need to strike at once or lose all. The Berber fleet spoken of tonight will attack the coast, probably at Rocca Forte, for, by holding the castle there and the Pass of Blood beyond, they can command the road to Palermo. Your task will be to await that attack and hold that castle in the teeth of any odds till the king can gather his forces and raise the siege. It will be hard and you may fail but upon your success depends the fate of Sicily!"

Ian's face hardened.

"And the fate of Fulvia!" he thought bitterly.

Having risked the king's wrath and the terrible enmity of the Almohades for his sake, she must now bear the brunt of an attack so strong, so merciless, that his soul shuddered to think of it. How could the walls of Rocca Forte, stout as they were, hold off thousands of raging fanatics to whom death was but the gate of paradise?

"If I return alive," he swore aloud, "I will hold the castle till the flesh is hacked from my bones!"

Khaled laughed again.

"I will go to Allah with you, my brother, for if the king does not stir himself in time, I will lead my own small force to Rocca Forte and hurl them into the Mahdi's jaws!"

CHAPTER VIII

FLIGHT

IT WAS almost noon when Ian woke. Beside his bed stood the Vizier of Secret Police.

"The thought came to me as you slept," said Khaled ben-Zobair, "that you were in greater danger from the king than from the true al-Mokhtar. You beguiled him neatly over Edrisi's globe; but what if he should ask you a question in Greek or Latin?"

Ian grimaced.

"I should answer in Gaelic," he smiled ruefully. "I know no more Greek or Latin than a horse."

"I thought so," the Moslem chuckled. "Therefore Roger is sick."

The two Scots stared.

"I must have you safe till you can get away from Palermo," Khaled went on. "I persuaded the king's physician, who is in my service, to drop into his wine a few drops of a potion that will do the king no worse harm than if he had eaten unripe melon. He sends word by me that he regrets his inability to entertain you till tomorrow."

"And then?"

"Anything may happen tomorrow," the Moslem assured him. "Allah has written it, but no man may read. Why, then, trouble one's self about it?"

"But you must forestall al-Mokhtar!" Ian protested. "We must not waste the

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day your forethought has won for us. It will give us time to escape to Rocca Forte."

"The time is not yet. After al-Mokhtar comes and before he can speak to the king, I will get you away, and, as soon as Achmed calls his fellow conspirators together, I will seize them and him. Then, and then only, can we induce the king to pardon you. In the mean time you must stay. If need be, Roger's sickness will last longer."

"I see," Ian mused; "and what are we to do now?"

"Today," replied Khaled, "we revisit the Garden of Heart's Delight."

"Anything but that!" declared Ian resolutely. "There is a woman in that place whom I knew in the Orient, and I am not sure that she did not recognize me last night. It was the chief dancer who danced in the fountain."

Khaled raised his eyebrows.

"Tell me about her," he urged.

So Ian told of his encounter with the Almohades in Iconium, of his imprisonment there and of the Sultana Gulnar's interest in his deliverance. When he had finished, Khaled spoke.

"She who danced in the fountain is known to us as Zobeida, mistress of the Garden of Heart's Delight. If the Sultan was slain as the result of an Almohade plot, then Abd el-Mumin himself must have had the sultana carried off to Sicily, for it was at the time of his coming that I first discovered her, meanly housed, in the silk-weavers' quarter. After allowing her a taste of poverty and doubtless threatening her life if she refused to carry out his orders, the Mahdi's agent established her in the ancient palace of the Moorish vizier.

"The foremost men in Palermo, both Christian and Moslem, frequent her house, not only to feast and watch the dancing-girls, but to talk with her, for she has great charm and is as wise as a Sufi. Many an ambitious Moslem has been converted to the Mahdi after the lovely Gulnar had enslaved him, and her house affords the entrance to the secret place of meeting. She is the Mahdi's slave, bound to obey him by her love of ease and her fear of death.

"There will be no need for us to visit her now, for you have told me what I wished to know. The day is our own, therefore, except for such time as I must spend receiving reports and giving orders, but that can be done as we go about the city. There is but one Palermo in the world, and you must see it. The Seignior Dugall, unfortunately, must remain in his chamber, by the king's command."

Ian darted a suspicious look at him.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Does Roger suspect——"

"Nothing. Roger is convinced that you are both what you pretend to be. But Christodoulos, who was not at our meeting in the cavern and plays a game of his own in which the Almohades are as much his tools as he is theirs, does suspect something amiss. Through the Mahdi he expects to rise to supreme power here in Sicily, if the conspiracy succeeds; if it fails, he knows he must perish. Therefore his wits are sharp and he suspects every one.

"Any disorder in the city might delay the fulfilment of his schemes, and he fears that a Scottish crusader may stir up disorder. It was not hard for him to persuade the king that such a man as Ian Dhu Mackay might be misled by his religious zeal to offend the native Moslems if he were allowed at liberty in the city. Moreover, I believe that he hopes to tempt the supposed Ian Dhu to join him in a counterplot, in case the Mahdi fails to carry out his promises to the Greek. Of course, he might decide to use Dugall as a hostage, to be surrendered to Abd el-Mumin in return for future concessions. If I am right, then Christodoulos wishes to have Dugall where he can reach him."

Dugall drew his great blade and fondled it lovingly.

"If I reach him first—" he said softly, but Khaled checked him.

"If he visits you while we are gone, receive him courteously, pretend to agree to whatever he asks of you and report to me. If you should kill him, much valuable information might perish with him."

THE inner city, separated from the palace and the *galga* by a sturdy wall, was divided in two by a continuation of the same splendid street by which Hugo had brought his companions into Palermo. From one end of the city to the other it was a gorgeous avenue of red marble, lined with palaces, churches, mosques, luxurious shops, synagogues and sumptuous residences. As Khaled piloted the supposed al-Mokhtar through the swirling crowds, he pointed out the finer buildings

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with a pride that bore clear testimony to his love and loyal devotion to his native city. Here and there he stopped to talk with an acquaintance singled out of the throng, and passed on again.

At the intersection of the marble way with a second avenue, he turned north and led Ian up a tremendous marble stair to the very top of the prodigious city wall. From its height they looked down over the northern half of the outer city, likewise walled. It was thickly settled in two populous quarters, the western quarter inhabited by Levantines, the eastern by Italians—Lombards, as they were then called—merchants from Genoa, Pisa, and Amalfi.

"They give me no trouble," Khaled commented. "Peaceful traders in fine fabrics, they ask only to be left alone. See the river which divides them from the wall. They rarely cross it but live in a world apart untouched by the life of the inner city. We will go down again and enter the hotbed of dissension—the Moslem quarter."

Descending they followed the cross-street south across the southern wall and into the *albergaria*. It, too, was separated from the inner city, or *kasr*, by a river, but the bridge across the muddy stream was thronged with people.

"It is called the Golden Bridge," said Khaled, "but less gold is seen upon it than steel, especially after dark."

A great suburb of low, flat-roofed houses stretched out before them, the sun beating fiercely upon their white surfaces. Nor were they laid out regularly, like the inner city, but were tunneled by twisted lanes and smelly alleys. There was little to show that once the Moorish ameers had reigned here, no trace of their departed glory. But following a wider street eastward, the two found themselves in a more prosperous district, full of recessed shops, punctuated with the minarets and bustling with nervous, gaily dressed people. A beggar, foul in greasy rags, approached the captain, shuffling and whining. Ian would have passed on, but the Arab stopped and fumbled for a coin. The beggar, yelping shrill gratitude, fawned at his benefactor's feet, kissed his hand and poured a flood of seemingly meaningless gibberish in his ear. As they went on Khaled spoke low to Ian.

"An excellent report. The *kemonia* is astir with rumors. Fifty men have been armed from a smith's shop in the Berber quarter. I must send more men there and close the shop."

Ian stared.

"That beggar—was he——"

"Yes, one of my best. You will see more."

Ian saw more. On their way to the *khalsa*, the old Moslem citadel, they stopped again and again, sometimes to price a rug, sometimes to chat with a sweeper or to take cool sherbets in a shady arcade. And always there was talk, cryptic and unintelligible to the Christian. As they reached the end of the quarter proper and climbed the steep hill leading to the *khalsa*, they stopped again outside the very wall of the citadel to exchange greetings with a green-turbaned hadji. When the old pilgrim had salaamed himself away Khaled ordered refreshments at a *fonduk* in the shelter of the rampart nearest the sea and, as they ate, pointed out the beauty of the scene to the north. Almost at their very feet, the blue harbor washed the base of the great wall; they could look across it to the other shore and inland, over the waving papyrus swamps to the northwest. Or, turning, they gazed down upon minaret and dome and tumbling flood of flat, parapeted roofs.

All day they idled about the ancient citadel, and at intervals the men of the secret police, in every imaginable garb and of every walk of life, gave their reports and took their orders unobtrusively. To the uninformed, a soldier in costly chain mail and a Moorish visitor were seeing the city, talking graciously with its every-day inhabitants—nothing more. The call of the muezzin rang out, and Khaled, prostrating himself, drew Ian down with him.

"The first lapse!" he warned. "Had you stood a moment more, your disguise would not have concealed the Christian."

It grew darker as they ate. A myriad twinkling lights appeared, transmuting the city into a fairy kingdom. Ian spoke of wine, but again the Moslem stopped him.

"We in Sicily drink in spite of the prophet's injunction, but there may be one or two here who know you, not as the king's guest, but as the emissary of the Mahdi. Remember, the Almohades neither drink nor use drugs. Be careful!"

Speaking softly, Ian returned to the talk of the morning.

"Christodoulos, then, is playing a double game?" he asked. "Last night, when he

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poke to me, it was as a Moslem, using the name of Allah, yet he neither wears the turban nor appears as a Moslem in the palace. Do not the Almohades suspect him of treachery?"

"No more than the king does. They mean to use him and then discard him, but only because they despise him for a renegade. Greek by birth, he has twice changed his faith and now is trying to pose as a Moslem among Moslems and a Latin Catholic among Christians. The Almohades have never admitted him to their secret councils; they have simply bribed him with gold and promises. If they succeed, and he leads the army into ambush, as he was promised them. they will kill him with his victims. No, I do not know that, but I am sure of it. No Moslem, orthodox or heretic, trusts a renegade."

"It were better for Sicily," Ian mused, "if your king were not so tolerant. Vigilance and severity would have kept the Almohades out and saved bloodshed."

"Roger is never vigilant and he knows better than to be too stern. If he were intolerant like your Christian kings, or like the Turks, the Arabs would rebel. So long as our faith is respected as Roger respects it, we are faithful to the death; but wo to that king who dares oppress our religion! There would be revolt, anarchy, massacres, such as even England has not witnessed."

Ian was astonished.

"What know you of England?" he asked.

"I have traveled there, and in Scotland, too. Your western lands need strong kings, merciless kings. Stephen of England is too weak for such a land. But we, with our many races and many faiths, need tolerance and kindliness as well as strength in a ruler. Roger is the ideal king for us. If he goes to sleep, as he often does, I watch for him. It goes ill with the traitor when the king wakes!"

Khaled was suddenly silent, his finger on his lip. From the obscurity of the *fonduk's* arch emerged the figure of a prosperous Moorish merchant, his burnoose of silk shot through with threads of gold. He looked about for a moment, then, seeing Khaled, he cried:

"Allah be with thee, O captain! I have the ginger for thee. It has just come in from Spain and will soon be brought down from the ship. See, there are her lights!" He pointed to where the lights of a galley at anchor twinkled upon the soft darknes below.

"Peace be upon thee, Ibn Eddin!" Khaled answered cordially. "I will see thee tomorrow and offer thee a fair price!" The merchant withdrew, bowing low.

A FEW minutes passed, then Khaled bent across the table, whispering: "Smile! Do not start at what I say. The merchant who spoke to me but now is one of my agents, and his message went deeper than it sounded. Yonder ship is from Spain, and that which is about to land from her is not merchandise, but the true Achmed al-Mokhtar, the friend of the Mahdi! Now talk and smile, and in a little while we shall leave this place swiftly."

After ten minutes of apparently aimless gossip, Khaled rose, paid and led his guest away through cross-streets to the wall of the *galga*. At once admitted by the guard, they hastened to Ian's apartments in the tower. They found the door open, the chambers empty. Dugall was gone!

For a moment the two stared at one another. Then Khaled summoned a servant and learned that the Scot, accompanied by Christodoulos, had left just before sunset. Where to, the servant did not know.

"You must flee without him, then!" Khaled whispered when the servant had left. "Achmed will be here within the hour and as soon as the king learns of your deceit, he will order the gates of the city closed and will send out soldiers to take you. I will get you away and see what can be done for your man later."

Ian shook his head.

"He is my servant and my kinsman and has been as a father to me in my tender years. I will not desert him."

"I do not ask you to. Long before the king's troops pick up the scent, he will be safe in my hands and I will hide him. You must go at once to Rocca Forte and hold the castle against the Berbers!"

Ian groaned.

"I would rather die by torture than leave Dugall behind!" he protested. "More than once he has nearly died for me. But you are right—I will go. May God forgive me!"

Nor, in that moment, was it the thought of Fulvia which wrung assent from him.

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Though in that moment her high courage and rich beauty laid hold of his heart, yet something greater than love or happiness overmastered both: the realization that upon him, a crusader, rested the fate of a great Christian people. Come what might, he must go back, though Dugall died, though he himself and even Fulvia in all her loveliness perished in defense of the cross.

As they passed out of the tower gate, a vendor of sweetmeats, his empty tray hanging askew about his neck, ran out of the blackness of the wall and panted in Khaled's ear:

"The Scot is on the Kemonia Bridge, fighting for his life with a mob! Christodoulos led him thither. I followed. A Berber jostled them and, when the Scot cursed him, drew a knife. Blows followed; then the mob attacked. Christodoulos slipped away."

"Have the police come up?" asked Khaled, referring not to his own force but to the city police.

"Not yet. Meeting Jafaar and Ibrahim, I sent them for others of the divan."

"Well done, Noureddin!"

Khaled was off at a run, Ian at his heels. Passing an armorer's stall, the Moslem flung down a handful of gold, snatched a simitar from the counter and handed the sword to Ian as they sped on.

Five minutes brought them to the bridge across the Kemonia, a short, massive arch of stone, high-railed and packed with a shouting, sweating mass of angry Mohammedans. Two-thirds of the way across the arch, towering above the mob, Dugall Mor swung his six-foot blade in glittering circles. The Highlander was in a red fury; three mangled corpses lay at his feet and a fourth behind him where the crowd was thinner and less daring. A tall Berber thrust through the press, waving a simitar, and flung himself at Dugall. The next instant the Berber's arm, still clutching the hilt, splashed into the water below.

Khaled and Ian, their swords drawn, ran along the coping toward their comrade. The mob gladly let them pass as obvious Moslems, pressing forward to the attack against the infidel. But, when they had covered half the distance, some one recognized the captain and, reaching out a sinewy arm, plucked him down. Ian ran on till Dugall, seeing a bearded figure in burnoose and tarboosh bearing down upon him with a simitar, made to strike at him. Ian shouted in Gaelic, and the broadsword was arrested in mid-stroke.

Khaled struggled frantically with his captor, but the man, reenforced by others, held his grip. There was no room for the captain to use his blade.

"Be still, Khaled!" cried the man who had seized him. "Interfere not to save the infidel! Art thou with the faithful or against them!"

Khaled cursed the interfering Almohade, but one of the men who held him said something in his ear, and the captain ceased resisting. The clutching hands relaxed somewhat, and he turned to the speaker.

"Ibrahim!" he shouted and added a sentence in Coptic. Ibrahim, converted Coptic Moslem and officer of secret police, immediately dodged out of reach of the Almohade beside him and pushed his way frantically through the crowd. Thinking him afraid to face the sword of Dugall, they let him pass, hooting with derision. Reaching the city end of the bridge, he disappeared in the still gathering throng.

Back to back with his clansman, Ian stood with drawn simitar. Tiles began to fly through the air, faster and faster. One struck and broke against Dugall's helmet, laying open his cheek with a jagged fragment. At the sight of blood, the mob burst the bonds of their fear and rushed forward, shouting and brandishing their knives, but, before they closed, there rang out, high above the tumult, a piercing wail:

"Ya, Hassan! Ya, Hussein! Ya, Hassan! Ya, Hussein!"

THE crowd stopped as if petrified. The tumult ceased, the brandished swords were rigid. Then again, from across the street behind them, that wail arose, the wail of the Shiite Moslem, the heretic, for the martyred grandsons of the prophet. The Sicilian Moslems were Sunnites, orthodox, haters of the Shiites more than of Christians or devils.

Suddenly the crowd, swept off its feet by the sacrilege of the wailing words, burst into one prolonged howl of fanatic frenzy. Turning, they swept back down the slope of the bridge while those behind the Scots flung themselves against the two who were keeping them from joining their fellows in the new attack on the Shiites. Ian, scenting

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the situation, shouted to Dugall and both, vaulting to the coping, let the Moslems who had been in their rear pass on.

The united mob was now cursing and shaking its fists at the balcony and shuttered windows of the only vacant house in the street. Khaled had known it was vacant and had sent Ibrahim thither on purpose. Nothing mattered to the people now save the destruction of the daring Shiite who had wantonly defamed the true succession of the califate. Let the Christian go; he was already forgotten.

Khaled stood alone in the middle of the bridge, Ian and Dugall at the farther end. They advanced to join him.

"Ibrahim has done the first half of his task well," Khaled smiled. "If he has done the rest as well, you may yet escape. Come!"

They followed him swiftly past the furious mob, ducked down a side street and turned back again toward the muddy waters of the Kemonia. Here, however, the streets were abandoned, for every Moslem of the quarter had rushed to swell the crowd at the bridge. Suddenly came the blare of trumpets and the sound of hoofs on the stone pavement.

"The city police!" exclaimed Khaled. "Be swift!"

They hastened on up the river-bank till they could see the huge, light-starred bulk of the palace on the right; then the captain struck for the river, wading among the reeds and ooze till a low whistle sounded from the papyrus clumps. A point of light gleamed, and they made their way toward it. In a moment they came to a little quay, half-choked with slime and water-plants. By it, where the clearer water came in, tongue-like, they found a boat, and on the quay stood a brown figure. "Ibrahim! Praise be to Allah!" Khaled cried fervently. "Well done, thou child of the desert."

The man laughed.

"It was a good plan of yours, lord vizier, and worked well. I slipped down the rear wall of that accursed house just in time and fell into the very arms of one who had taken advantage of the confusion to rob the house. But, hearing my shouts, he was too good a Sunnite to finish his work and he laid hold of me and cried out. I had to knife him."

"Where are the horses?" Khaled asked abruptly. "There is but little time. Achmed al-Mokhtar may be in the palace now."

"Not yet. Noureddin has been watching for him. The king is recovered from his sickness, however." Ibrahim grinned at his vizier. "Yusuf waits with the horses at the Admiral's Bridge."

They entered the boat. Ibrahim reached for the oars but Dugall forestalled him.

"We have need of speed, good fellow," he said, and put his back into it. The boat, a graceful Arab craft with lines of a racing-gondola, sped up the sluggish river as it had never sped before, the stout blades bending almost to the breaking-point as the Highlander's brawny arms dipped and swung them. The moon rose as they reached the Admiral's Bridge, a splendid structure of squared stone, in the Roman fashion, spanning the Oreto just above its meeting with the Kemonia. A grove of date-palms, graceful and suggestive of a desert oasis, rose at the farther end of the bridge. Beneath them waited a man with two horses.

Stripping off his burnoose, Ian threw it into the river with his Arab head-gear. Stooping to the water's edge, he soaked his false beard till the glue dissolved; then he plucked it away. He stood now in the Norman tunic and hose of mail which Fulvia had given him, but he bound to his side the simitar Khaled had bought for him earlier in the evening.

"Thanks be to God, that is done with!" he exclaimed, turning to Khaled. "My brother—for my brother you are, though you follow one faith and I another—I will keep my promise to you while life lasts. Whatever happens, I will hold Rocca Forte! Accept my thanks for the debt of life we owe to you."

Khaled shook his hand warmly.

"You owe me nothing. Allah bring you back! You have a long ride before you, and the horses will be weary, therefore you must break the journey. This road parallels the main highway as far as Monreale, where the two join. By daybreak you should reach La Stanza. I have a villa there where you may rest yourselves and your beasts till nightfall tomorrow. It is the third in sight from the highway. Peace be upon you!"

"And on you, peace!" Ian replied in the Moslem formula. They mounted and rode off, Dugall shouting a loud farewell, Ian waving. Khaled returned to the boat, and Ibrahim bent to the oars.

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CHAPTER IX

BOUND

RIDING fast, the Scots reached the junction of the Monreale road with the highway before midnight and, spurring on, scanned the landscape to both sides for signs of habitations. It was still dark when they saw the walls of the third villa shimmering in the moonlight, well back from the road. The gate was open, and a long lane led back to the villa.

"We are earlier than Khaled thought," Ian observed as they rode through the gateway. The lane was lined with dense shrubbery, its leaves silver in the moonlight.

"The earlier, the more we shall sleep," Dugall answered. Their horses' hoofs thudded wearily on the hard surface. Suddenly a mass of shadow lifted and flooded from the shrubbery, poured upon them and over them. Before they could move or speak, a score of hands pulled them from the saddles and threw them down and a multitude of swarming figures in black robes piled upon them. In an instant they were bound hand and foot, lifted to the shoulders of many men and borne helpless toward the white walls of the villa.

The double doors opened wide to admit them. They were carried inside, along a corridor flaming with torches, and down a stone staircase. Below was another corridor, ending in a large gloomy vault, so far below the level of the earth that the stone roof was high, and the torchlight lost in its dimness. The captives were borne to two great pillars of limestone which supported the roof and there placed upright, each with his back to a pillar.

A huge Berber, taking a bunch of keys from his girdle, raised the manacles that were anchored fast in the pillars, and shackled their feet and hands, one after the other. With a grin, the Berber fetched a pitcher of water and set it down where they could see but not reach. Then, with shouts of mocking laughter, the grim black figures slowly left the vault. The iron door clanged behind them and a key grated in the lock.

Dugall cursed savagely in Gaelic. Ian was silent. Then, for minutes that seemed hours, they strained at the chains that bound them, till their muscles throbbed with pain and their wrists were torn and bloody. It was of no avail. His anger boiling within him, Dugall cursed their captors, their errand, the Almohades, the king and even Khaled. But here Ian stopped him.

"Khaled has nothing to do with this," he said sternly. "He risked his office and his very life to free us from danger. Either the Almohades have stormed his villa, or we mistook his directions and came to the wrong house. He said we should reach it by daybreak, and it is still long before morning."

"But it was the third," Dugall muttered.

"Aye, but I would risk my life on Khaled's honor."

"You have done so already," the giant retorted. "I am as thirsty as a lost soul a-burning, and that pitcher is as far away as heaven."

"Which may be nearer than you think. Calm yourself and prepare your soul for martyrdom. Remember, we have worn the cross."

The minutes passed. The captives were silent now. From time to time they strove to free themselves, but always uselessly. The night seemed endless.

Suddenly the key creaked in the rusty lock; the door groaned on its hinges.

"Now!" whispered Ian. "Face them like a man and a servant of Christ!"

The feeble torchlight flickered as the door swung open and, in its rays, they saw a slender figure enter the vault. Its shape was indistinct in the half-light, but its outlines could partly be made out by the glitter of its gilded chain mail. Where the face should be, the light picked out fine meshes of steel.

"The Mahdi!" Dugall whispered. "No man has seen his face!"

"Be not a fool!" Ian answered gruffly.

The door closed again, and the figure advanced upon them. For a moment it stood silent, then, in a hoarse whisper, asked—

"Ian Dhu Mackay, would you and your servant accept freedom?"

"At what price?" Ian answered softly, astonished but resolved to make no compact—if one were indeed offered, and this was not a grim jest—at the expense of his honor.

"At a price indeed, but none that you may not honestly pay."

"I have little of this world's gear," the Scot replied.

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"You have one thing I would accept," the mysterious figure answered, "and you can offer it without shame."

"Then I will give it, but how do I know that you will fulfil your bargain, since I know not who you are?"

"Because the price I ask is one which you can not pay me until you are free and safe."

"Name it."

"Swear by your saint, the *Bibi Miriam*, that you will give me what I ask as soon as you are free."

And Ian, assured that he could pay the price with honor, anxious only that he might escape to guard Rocca Forte and Fulvia from the bloody hands of the Berbers, swore by the Virgin Mary to pay whatever might be asked.

As soon as the words had left his lips, the stranger lifted the torch from its socket, threw back the war-mask of steel and velvet, and stood before them. Clearly revealed by the light, the figure, in spite of the loose-fitting mail, was that of a woman. The face evoked a startled exclamation from Ian. It was Gulnar, Gulnar of Iconium and of the Garden of Heart's Delight!

"THE price I ask," she said in a voice soft and infinitely tender, "is your hand in marriage. Oh, you blind, cold Frank, that you did not know long ago! That you did not know when I delivered you from the sultan's prison! I knew you, Ian Dhu, when all others were deceived. I knew you in your burnoose and long, reverend beard! For a moment I was in doubt, but your eyes I knew, for I had often looked into them when I visited you in your confinement at Iconium. And once you smiled, as I had often seen you smile. I will free you and you shall be mine!"

Ian's brain whirled. Often enough, he recalled, the sultana had visited his prison in her husband's castle; often had she looked at him and smiled upon him, but he had never dreamed— And that she should be here! For a moment he did not grasp the full import of his promise. Then, realization flooding upon him, he was sick at heart.

She was a beautiful woman, beautiful beyond desire, but as that which he had sworn to do took hold upon his mind, he felt no desire for her. His heart was Fulvia's, his life was Fulvia's, and now he had sworn away all hope of her, all the hope and love that had been slowly gathering in his soul. A feeble ray of light gleamed in upon his troubled thoughts.

"A Christian can not marry a Moslem," he urged. "Our faith forbids it; it means eternal damnation."

Gulnar bent to unlock the chains that bound him and, as she removed them, she kissed his torn wrists. Then, smiling up at him, she answered:

"I have no faith but yours, my husband. Your God is my God. I would forswear heaven itself for you!"

"Forswear it, then, and unloose me!" Dugall growled. "Am I a sheep, to be trussed up in this way? It is not my marriage."

The shackles removed, the two men instinctively stretched their cramped limbs. Then Ian, struggling with the astonishment of that which had happened, asked:

"How came you here, Gulnar? How can you get us free?"

"I am in the Mahdi's service," she answered a little sadly. He ordered my husband slain and carried me off to Sicily. In his interest I maintained the garden and tempted Sicilian Moslems from their loyalty. I did not wish to do it, but they swore I should be killed by torture if I refused. When you should come—when al-Mokhtar should come—the plot would be ripe. So, when you appeared, Ibn at-Timnah bade me make ready to come hither, and I came last night in man's garb, so that none who saw me should know Zobeida of the garden had left the city. The Mahdi has still work for me to do, but I shall never do it now, for you will take me away."

"How was it that the fanatics were lying in wait for us at such an hour?"

"Those that seized you were a newly arrived band that, at the sound of your horses' hoofs, hid in the garden."

"But what are the Almohades doing here in the house of Khaled?"

"This is not Khaled's house. His villa is a full two hour's ride to the east."

"I knew it!" Ian exclaimed joyfully. "I knew he would not betray us! What is that low, limestone building just this side of the Monreale road? Is it a villa?"

"It is a ruined church of the Greeks," Gulnar answered.

"Then this is the second villa, not the third. Khaled is no traitor. It is we who are fools!"

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Gulnar plucked at Ian's arm.

"Come," she urged. "It will soon be light and we must be well away before dawn."

She led them into the corridor. About ten paces from the door of the vault lay their Berber jailor, sprawled on his back, unconscious.

"Dead?" whispered Ian. "Or drunk?"

"Neither. I brought him food in which I had secreted enough *bhang* to make a camel sleep. Then I took his keys."

They went, not toward the stair by which they had come, but toward the rear of the house and up a narrower stair leading to the servant's quarters. As they neared the top, Gulnar extinguished the torch and they groped their way on slowly. The rear door or postern seemed unguarded, but Gulnar bade them wait and went through it, leaving it open.

In a moment they heard her laughing and talking with a man whose deep, guttural Arabic was that of a Berber. A white hand rested an instant on the door-casing, luminous against the dark, and the fingers beckoned. Moving forward so slowly, so softly, that their mail gave no sound, the two Scots stole through the door into a tiny court with a gate, upon which leaned a tall Berber. His back was turned to them; beside him stood Gulnar. Her hand still rested on the postern behind her, for the court was merely a small entranceway.

His eyes intent upon the Berber guarding the gate, Dugall saw, hanging over the man's back, his own sword. With a little snarl in his throat, he gripped the Berber by the neck, thrust one knee in his back, close to the sword, and gave a mighty wrench. There was a dull crunch, and the Berber collapsed. Snatching the sword, Dugall slung it over his shoulder and opened the gate. Ian turned the dead man over with his foot. It was Ibn at-Timnah who had led the attack upon them in Iconium, who had guided Ian to the Garden of Heart's Delight.

"Wait!" whispered Gulnar and, running back into the house, she returned shortly with the very simitar which the Almohades had stripped from Ian's side.

"Keep close to the wall!" she cautioned, and, crouching in the shadow of the house, they crept forward behind her. The moon had set, and the place was in dense darkness. Dawn would break in an hour. A clump of bushes loomed dark to the right of them, and Gulnar made toward it, the Scots after. From its shelter they glided toward a dense hedge and followed this to the road.

"We must cross in the open to the highway where I have hidden horses," Gulnar said softly.

Ian drew his sword and, with a heartening swish of steel on leather, Dugall followed his example. They had almost reached the road when one of the horses whinnied. Instantly there was a challenge from the gate, the rattle of mail and the rush of feet.

"Run!" cried Gulnar.

Their way took them along one side of a triangle while the Almohades, to head them off, must take the other two sides. For very life they ran, till Gulnar lagged behind; then Ian, faithful to his oath, swung her to his shoulder and hastened on. As they reached the road, the fanatics, a stream of indistinct dark shapes, poured out from the gate and raced after them.

A precious moment was lost in mounting. Ian lifted the girl to her saddle, mounted his own horse, turned and swung his simitar. Dugall, clinging with the muscles of his mighty legs, whirled in the saddle and brandished the giant blade. The foremost pursuers went down in their tracks, cut half in two, and the Scots drove the spurs home.

They went down the fine road like leaves before the wind, the Berbers rushing behind. But, taken by surprize, the fanatics had not stayed to get horses from the stables and were easily outdistanced.

When the road behind them was clear and the very shouts of their foes indistinct Dugall spoke:

"Whither now? We must stop somewhere before we reach Rocca Forte."

"No. It can not be more than eighteen miles now, and we have fresh horses. We need not stop, unless Hugo challenges us as we pass Corleone."

Gulnar reined close to him.

"I have kept my word," she said shyly. "You will keep yours?"

"I have promised," he answered honestly. "I can not pretend to love you, Gulnar, but I will keep my oath."

She did not flinch.

"Once you are my husband, I will make you love me," she said.

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CHAPTER X

TO THE HILLS

HUGO did challenge them. His battlements dominated the highway, his men-at-arms challenged the three riders and escorted them into the bailey, where the steward set a warm breakfast before them, with sirupy red wine. While they were eating it, Hugo appeared.

"Welcome back, Ian Dhu!" he cried. "And to you too, Dugall! But in the name of the saints, what are ye doing with Zobeida of the garden? Is she a gift from Roger? And are you pardoned?"

Briefly Ian told all that had happened, presenting Gulnar as his betrothed, but taking care not to mention the manner in which she had won his promise.

"It is a bad business and will end in blood," Hugo said gravely. "If I did my duty, I should lock you up in my dungeon and send word to the king, but when all is said, you have gone far toward saving the kingdom, and it is to Sicily even more than to Roger that I owe allegiance. Therefore I will not only let you go, but give you provisions and fresh horses for the rest of the journey.

"But do not think that Rocca Forte can not do without you. Fulvia is able to take care of herself, and, if necessary, I am here to help her. I am not sure that you would not do best to go home to your own land, lest the king's anger fall on her for sheltering you."

"Khaled will take care of that," Ian assured him. "It is not impossible that al-Mokhtar is already in irons and the chief conspirators with him."

"If ben-Zobair has been able to lay hands on him, all may come out well," Hugo reflected. "Remain at Rocca Forte for a while till I can learn how matters have gone at Palermo. I will try to send you word in time, but I fear that Roger will be so bitter against you for making a fool of him that he will not rest till he has your head on a stake."

"That will cost him more than he thinks," Dugall rumbled.

"Oh, if it comes to the worst, you will find me against you also," Hugo warned them. "I am faithful to the hand that feeds me. But Heaven protect you, as it can if it will. Watch for my messenger."

AFTER resting through the day at Corleone, the three took the road again at nightfall and arrived at Rocca Forte late the following day. Fulvia, informed by the warder of their approach, was waiting for them in the hall.

This was the moment Ian had been dreading. The sight of Fulvia, more beautiful even than he remembered her, was torture to him. Concealing his emotions as well as he could, he presented Gulnar as his affianced wife.

Fulvia received her with formal courtesy and at once assumed care of her.

"The Lady Gulnar is weary with riding, and you would keep her here while you tell me of your idle doings in Palermo?" she cried. "I will not hear another word till she has eaten. Come with me, child."

Gulnar followed her hostess, who took her to her own chamber, bade the maid servant fetch her warm water, food and wine, and then returned to the hall.

"Well?" she asked, and Ian told his story.

Fulvia listened with keen interest. When he had done—and once more he said nothing of the oath into which Gulnar had entrapped him—she remarked somewhat dryly—

"You told me of your sultana before, but you did not speak of love for her."

"I did not know it myself then," Ian answered uneasily.

"You learn quickly. Am I permitted to ask when this happened? You seem not to have had much time for wooing."

"It happened when she delivered us from prison," Ian answered. He flushed perceptibly, even under his dark skin.

"I see. Doubtless she had loved you long. I trust you will be happy."

"She is beautiful."

"I can see that. Am I blind? And now, Ian Dhu, you will wish to return to Scotland soon, will you not?"

Ian caught the point of the question but he ignored it.

"I am needed here," he replied.

Fulvia smiled. "I think not. If the Berbers come, which I doubt, I can take care of them well enough, and I would not keep you here against your will."

Ian rose, flaming with injured pride.

"I see plainly," he began, "that I am no longer welcome here. None the less, I will stay until I hear from Khaled that the danger

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is past. Having entered your service, I am not the man to quit it while you are in peril, and all Sicily through you."

"You will not be in my service if I dismiss you. Use your wits, man. I am no woman of the court, too soft to defend herself. I was born in the midst of war and turmoil. I have held my own against Norman barons who were ten times more to be feared than all the Moors in Africa. I am equal to any emergency war can bring but I am not equal to playing hostess here to another woman. Every man-at-arms in the castle will be making eyes at her and my discipline will go to ruin."

"You speak of my betrothed," Ian coldly reminded her.

"I speak of a Moslem woman, and these girls of the harem are all alike. They think only of charming men. It is impossible. You must go and take her with you. One pretty woman is all Rocca Forte can hold. It is not for nothing that God made me fair. It was that I might rule my men and hold Rocca Forte for the king."

Ian struggled hard with his pride. If he had followed his inclination, he would have gone at once, but Gulnar was weary to exhaustion and he must stay till he had heard from Khaled or at least from Hugo, and deep in his heart there stirred a stubborn determination to convince the self-sufficient countess that there were emergencies too great for her to meet or even to understand.

"I have seen how the Mahdi has sown the royal court itself with his doctrines and planted spies among the king's most trusted advisers," he reminded her. "How do you know that your own Moslems are not rotten with treachery?"

But the girl was as obstinate as he.

"I will take the risk," she answered. "My wits have saved me more than once; they at least will be faithful."

"Are my wounded able to endure the voyage?" he asked.

"Two have died; the rest are well enough. The Mediterranean is calm at this season."

Ian turned to Dugall, who was fuming with rage at his chief's treatment, and spoke a few words in Gaelic. The giant marched out stiffly, neither speaking to his hostess nor looking at her.

"He has gone," Ian explained, "to see to the ship."

For ten minutes Fulvia and Ian stood facing each other, speaking little, both under a strain that could not endure long.

Suddenly a cry went up from the battlements. Ian's lips smiled slightly. Then, almost together, Dugall Mor and the officer Raoul burst into the hall.

"The Scottish ship is burning!" the Norman cried.

Fulvia looked from him to Dugall, whose face was beaming with satisfaction and streaked with soot. From him she turned to Ian, who nodded.

"By my order," he declared. "You have dismissed me and I shall leave your house this day, but neither you nor Roger himself shall budge me from Sicily till I choose to go, and I do not choose so long as you are in danger. We are mountaineers, and the mountains are near at hand. When you need us, we will come. Not a fox will enter Rocca Forte without our knowing, not a man can leave it but we shall see him. Our departure will avert Roger's anger from you, yet we shall be close enough when we are wanted."

Fulvia's cheeks flushed scarlet. Pointing toward the chamber where Gulnar rested in happy unconsciousness, she stammered—

"And—and she?"

"I grieve that I must leave her here where she is unwelcome," Ian replied, "but she could not endure to sleep on the dew-soaked ground with the mists for a cloak. When I am gone you may be able to put up with her more easily." He swept her a low bow and left, Dugall following.

In the bailey, Ian summoned his ten *duni-wassals* and gave them his orders. Without noise, confusion, or delay, the Highlanders, girding on their swords and donning their mail, formed in the court and streamed out over the drawbridge. They marched silently, their faces dour and proud. The five who were still too badly hurt to walk were carried on litters improvised from cloaks bound to a frame of long Lochaber axes.

At the outer gate a man-at-arms, excited by the burning of the ship and this sudden departure, challenged them. Instantly Dugall's blade flashed from its sheath.

"To arms!" the sentry shouted. "The Scots attack!"

Out swarmed the garrison from the bailey, steel flashed, archers on the wall drew their bows, but none struck a blow, for in that moment Fulvia appeared in the archway and bade her soldiers let the Scots depart in peace. Turning, Ian looked long into her

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eyes from his place in the rear-guard, but she did not speak and moved away as if she had not seen him.

While the Normans watched them from the walls, the Scots marched down the zig-zag ramp, past the barbican and down the road. Crossing through the village, they made straight as homing bees for the green-clad slopes of the high Madonian Mountains.

Fulvia lay huddled in the darkest corner of the hall, weeping silently, and in her chamber Gulnar slept the sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XI

THE RENEGADE

IT CHANCED that Mathilde, Fulvia's maid servant, found her mistress sobbing. She attempted consolation, and was swiftly sent away in tears, resentful and itching with curiosity. As soon as she learned that the Scots had gone, her romantic middle-aged mind began to piece things together with ultimately disastrous results.

When the storm of weeping had passed and Fulvia arose somewhat calmed, she found Ibn Hawwas standing near with a bowl of perfumed water.

"It is good for the eyes," he said innocently.

She bathed her eyes, stealing furtive little glances at him between her fingers, as if half-expecting to be scolded.

"What a spoiled child it is," he mused aloud, "to fling its broken toys away. Broken playthings are better than none, little daughter."

After Count Arnulfo's death, the orphaned girl had begun to call the faithful old man "father," but now, a trace of her anger at Ian blazing up again, she cried sharply:

"What do you mean? You speak in riddles!"

"Yet the riddle is easy to read. Why did you send the Scot away? I saw him from the tower and he bore himself like an angry man. Child, it was unworthy of you. What right has he given you to be jealous?"

"Jealous?"

"Aye. Do not seek to fool an old man who loves you. It was the woman who came with him, of course. What of her? What is she to you?"

"She is to be his wife!" Fulvia cried, unable to restrain herself. Hawwas nodded.

"So that is it. What of it? You have known him but a few days, have scarcely seen him. Let him marry her. She is lovely enough for any man. I know, for she needed sleep and I gave her a sleeping-potion. She is as fair as a Persian rose."

Now Fulvia lost her temper indeed. Tears of rage came into her eyes. She stamped her foot.

"She shall not have him!" she cried and blushed furiously. Hawwas changed his manner at once.

"Did it ever occur to you, little daughter, that she has an excellent chance of having him? You offended him, sent him away. While he is off there in the mountains, he will have plenty of time to think, and of what will he think? Why, that one woman loves him and is kind to him, while a certain other treats him with scorn. You were foolish to drive him away. Besides, it was insufferably rude.

"You are spoiled, spoiled since your babyhood. Whatever you cried for was always given you and, now that you are grown, with a woman's beauty and more than a woman's cunning, you take what you want. Not knowing what it means to be denied, you fly into a passion the first time your desires are balked. You can not win a man's heart in such a fashion."

"I do not want his heart. I do not love him," she protested.

"Then why did you send him away? What is it to you whom he marries, if you do not love him?"

For a while Fulvia was silent, plucking at the rope of pearls round her neck. Then she raised a white, tense face to Hawwas and said softly:

"It is true. I love him, but now it is too late."

"As Allah wills!" the Moslem piously exclaimed.

THE next night came Christodoulos with horsemen at his back, asking and receiving admission in the king's name. Once in, he most courteously reminded the Countess Fulvia of her duty to aid him in the arrest of Ian Dhu Mackay, Dugall Mor and their turbulent followers. But, though Fulvia gave her word the Scots had gone, Christodoulos insisted that his men—swaggering, insolent Arabs—search the castle.

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In ten minutes they came hurtling back into the great hall, pursued by angry Norman men-at-arms. Jaufré was there with Fulvia and together they managed to restore peace.

"We found a locked chamber in the tower," cried Selim, the Arab officer. "We were beating the door down when these Christians fell upon us with swords."

Christodoulos was sniffing the air, now pungent with sulfur. "You have a chemist here," he observed.

"How can I perfect my experiments," asked a querulous voice, "if I am always disturbed? I— Oh, God!" It was Heraclides who had entered, wrapped in a leathern apron. He had recognized his ancient enemy, Christodoulos, who smiled appreciatively at his rival's agony of fear.

"Welcome to Sicily, Admiral Basil," he purred and then turned to the officer, Selim. "Truss him up and throw him into the dungeon!"

Here Fulvia intervened.

"I am still mistress here," she cried. "Touch a servant of mine, and I will summon my men to cut you in pieces! If you perform the king's command peacefully, you will meet no resistance; otherwise I will defend myself and take the responsibility with the king!"

Instantly the renegade's insolence dropped from him.

"Forgive me, my lady!" he begged. "There shall be no more violence. Unfortunately, that which has already taken place compels me to use the power conferred on me and take over command of the castle. From now on, I grieve to say you are no longer mistress, but the king's guest here, till the Scots are apprehended. But I assure you, on my honor, that no harm shall befall your servants so long as they refrain from rebellion."

"What guaranty," asked Fulvia, "have I that your servants will refrain from violence?"

"My word and the justice of the king!"

"Then with that I must be content. Are you satisfied that the Scots are not in my house?"

"I am. Tomorrow I shall search the town, the Moslem village and the countryside. Who commands at your fief of Castrocavalli?"

"Gui de la Garde."

"I beg that you will send for him at once."

"I can kindle the bale-fire on the tower. That will bring him with all his force."

"So much the better," Christodoulos assured her, "for I have use for them. And now, if you will permit, my men are hungry."

BEHIND the barred door of his own room, Hawwas, the castle physician, was deep in a whispered conversation with one of the renegade's Moslem officers.

"So it was al-Mokhtar, the Mahdi's agent, who persuaded the king to send Christodoulos here?"

The soldier nodded.

"Roger is furious over the way he was tricked; so, at first, was al-Mokhtar with Christodoulos, for guiding the Scot to the Almohade rendezvous. Now the fanatics have been warned against gathering together, so Khaled has been unable to arrest them."

"Did not Khaled go to the king?"

"Aye, but Roger was already closeted with al-Mokhtar in his study, immersed in scientific problems, and would see no one. The next day he sent for Christodoulos, with what result, you know.

"We of the secret police are checkmated. Khaled had hoped that Ian Dhu would be here and persuade the countess to resist Christodoulos, but now it is too late. The Greek has three hundred men and will scour the hills!"

"I will take measures of my own," said Hawwas.

When the other had gone, he descended to the lowest arrow-slot in the tower, drew from beneath his burnoose a coil of fine rope and threw the weighted end into the darkness. Presently he felt a tug at the end. A low whistle floated up from below.

"Gian!" he cried softly.

"Aye, Hawwas!"

There followed a few moments of conversation, and Ibn Hawwas stole quietly up the stairs, taking the unneeded rope with him.

LONG after midnight, Gulnar awoke from the sleep into which the drug had cast her. Safe from the Almohades and happy in Ian's promise, she smiled, and then from the darkness a deep voice spoke.

"Wo to thee, daughter of Shaitan! Wo to thee who didst deliver from bondage the

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infidel, the enemy of the Faith! But here, even here, the hand of the Mahdi has closed upon thee and soon it will close upon him for whom thou hast destroyed thy soul!"

"Mercy!" she gasped.

"There is no mercy. There is no forgiveness—save in one way. The Mahdi still has use for thee. If thou wilt surrender thyself to him and carry out his commands fully and faithfully, thy sin may be pardoned. Otherwise death and the everlasting fire for thee; and for thy lover, the torture!"

Shaking with terror, Gulnar tried in vain to speak.

"I wait," the ominous voice menaced.

"I—I will obey!" she gasped. "If I do all that he bids, will the Mahdi grant me the life of Ian Dhu?"

"It may be. There is no other chance for thee or for him. Dress swiftly and come with me. The gate is held by the spearmen of Christodoulos and we shall pass safely. Hasten!"

CHAPTER XII

CHRISTODOULOS MAKES HIMSELF AT HOME

CHRISTODOULOS ordered his men to levy on the Greek and Moslem towns of Rocca Forte for grain, wine and fodder, with a rigor that produced rebellion which was suppressed with the simitar. Pack-mules wound their way up the ramp with bundles of loot; cattle were driven in and supplies heaped up as if for a siege.

Forty hours later Gui rode in at the head of his thirty mounted men-at-arms. The bale-fire, relayed by a second beacon at the Pass of Blood, meant instant peril to his lady's castle, and the ardent young Provençal had spared neither man nor horse. When he found no sign of siege, his temper rose because his pangs of anxiety had been needless. When he learned that the summons was the work of Christodoulos, he stormed out of the great hall, cursing the Byzantine and the king that had sent him. When he met the romantic Mathilde and learned of the coming of Gulnar and Fulvia's grief at the departure of Ian Dhu, he flew into a second rage ten times greater than the first. Ian Dhu had won Fulvia's heart and flouted her—so Gui interpreted Mathilde's story—and Ian Dhu must die.

The jealous youth was now pliable material for the wily Byzantine. Christodoulos soon convinced him that Gui was the very man to track down and capture the outlawed Scots. Thoroughly befooled, honest Gui shook hands with the traitor and led his thirty horsemen into the hills.

Christodoulos then ordered Jaufré to ride to Castrocavalli with two-thirds of the Rocca Forte garrison. The captain protested, but Fulvia confirmed the order, for the king was master and Christodoulos his man.

But when the renegade next sent her two war-galleys off to Messina, she realized too late that, for some hidden purpose, he was stripping Rocca Forte of its strength. The true nature of this purpose she did not suspect, for, despite the character Heraclides had given him, Christidoulos was the king's justiciar and was here by the king's command. Her own impatience had given Ian no chance to tell her what he had learned of the Greek.

She suspected enough, however, to trouble her greatly when Christodoulos admitted into the castle two hundred savage-looking Mohammedan infantry who had come up under cover of darkness. The garrison now consisted of twenty Normans and five hundred Moslems—a strange force to hold a Christian fortress for a Christian king. The mysterious disappearance of Gulnar worried the countess still further.

Chrsitodoulos began to assume intolerable airs. Entering the tower room Heraclides used as a laboratory, he abused his helpless enemy, broke flasks, opened the door of the clay furnace to spoil the heat and played the petty tyrant generally. Noticing a cup of water beside an iron pot, he poured it in to see what would happen.

A tremendous spout of flame shot up, burning fiercely for many minutes.

"Aha!" cried Christodoulos. "And how much more of this have you made, my little chemist?"

"That was all," Heraclides answered sullenly.

Thereafter he continued his experiments in peace, but whenever Heraclides left the tower, the renegade entered silently and searched the laboratory through and through.

HALF-DEAD with weariness and fear, Gulnar was brought back to the same villa from which she had delivered the two Scots. Her guide thrust her into a room and closed the door behind

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her. The room was empty and unfurnished; the end opposite the door was screened by a faded Moorish rug.

Hidden hands plucked the rug away. On a throne-like seat sat a huge man robed in coarse black, his face veiled from forehead to chin by a black mask that revealed only his piercing eyes. Gulnar fell prostrate with a cry of terror.

"So, traitress, thou hast returned!" he said in a voice that tore through her anguished mind as a knife-point tears through tortured flesh. "Choose now between two things and know that thy choice is eternal. Wilt thou obey, or die?"

"Oh, Mahdi! Oh, Holy One! I will obey!"

"It is well for thee. A second time there will be no forgiveness. This is what thou must do:

"Thou knowest Khaled ben-Zobair, captain of the palace guard. He must die, and thou must lure him to his doom. Thou canst do it, for he is a man and thou art a beautiful woman, fair as the houris of paradise. There is a ruined tower in the Valley of the Moon, in the heart of the Madonian Mountains. I have chosen it as the gathering-place of the faithful, for it is far from Palermo and close by Rocca Forte. Khaled will know where it is. It is for thee to bring him thither."

"I can not!" Gulnar cried hopelessly. "He is——"

She broke off. Useless to tell this man that Khaled had saved the man she loved from discovery and death in the cavern of the Almohades; it would but make him the more pitiless.

"Thou canst. Cunning as he is, he will come. Fail not, or thou shalt die, after first seeing him thou lovest given to the torture of fire. I give thee seven days. Go!"

IAN soon found that the mountains of Sicily were not like those of Scotland. Vineyards and olive-groves covered the lower slopes, forcing him and his men to haunt the donax thickets and forests of oak and chestnut from two to six thousand feet above the sea. It was October and the nuts were dropping. Snared birds and rabbits, with an occasional wild boar, kept them in meat, and the limestone mountains abounded in springs.

Hawk-eyed as the Highlanders were, they watched the road in vain, for Christodoulos and his forces came by night. The Scots saw his turbaned foragers harry the villagers and drive the cattle, and, for a moment, Ian thought the Berbers had come in the night, but there was no fleet and Fulvia's banner still flew from the keep.

On the fourth day he saw thirty horsemen ride out from the castle and up into the hills, led by a man too slender for Jaufré. They were too many for messengers and too few for a hostile force sent to hunt him down.

The next day, the two war-galleys were gone from the harbor. That, and the balefire and the presence of the Moslems puzzled Ian sorely, but still Fulvia's banner flew from the keep and no messengers came from her to ask his aid.

FULVIA sat at supper in the hall with Christodoulos, Hawwas and the officer, Raoul. Mathilde was waiting on them. Suddenly an angry outcry rose from the bailey. The Arab Selim rushed into the hall, his drawn sword in his hand.

"Master, they poison our men!" he cried.

All rose and ran out into the court. There, nearly twoscore men lay prone and still in the torchlight below the tables where they had been eating. Some clutched their empty wine-cups, and the pavement was wet with spilled wine.

"You have poisoned them!" Christodoulos shouted furiously. "Your dog of a chemist mixed drugs in the wine!"

"Then how is it that all of my men and but a few of yours have suffered?" Fulvia asked quietly.

Hawwas was in the court now, feeling the pulses of the unconscious men, lifting back their eyelids and gazing at the pupils.

"Selim! Seize that man!" commanded Christodoulos. "This shall be reported to the king! Till he gives judgment, you, countess, shall be confined with your waiting-woman in your chamber. These others to the dungeon! Away with them!"

A dozen Moors seized Hawwas, Raoul and the servants and rushed them toward the stair which led to the dungeon, a gloomy vault underneath the keep. Fulvia, followed by the terrified Mathilde, mounted to her chamber. When she had gone, Christodoulos ordered:

"Lay these Normans in the stables and guard them well. They will recover by morning. Leave them not so much as a dagger among them!"

In the morning, the soldier who had

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brought food and water to the prisoners in the dungeon reported that the physician Hawwas had disappeared. There was an open drain in one corner to let off the water that gathered there during the rains. It was not wide, but a small man might, perhaps, crawl through it. The grating which had barred passage through it had been cut.

CHAPTER XIII

WAR IN THE HILLS

CONOCHAR, the *duniwassal*, put down a half-gnawed bone and crept silently into the darkness beyond the camp-fire. Presently he returned with a prisoner—a lean little man with one hand.

"You Scots have keen ears, Seignior Ian," said the captive composedly. "No Sicilian could have heard or found me in that thicket. I come from Rocca Forte, though by far ways."

"The Lady Fulvia sent you? Is it well with her?" Ian asked anxiously.

"Ibn Hawwas sent me, but of that in good time. Christodoulos the renegade holds the castle in the king's name till you and your men are caught."

"God in heaven!" cried Ian. "He was sent to deliver Rocca Forte to the Berbers!"

"Of that I know nothing. Knowing Christodoulos somewhat, I feared evil to the Lady Fulvia, my guardian angel, so I lay in wait in the darkness below the tower. Soon Hawwas leaned forth and bade me hasten to Corleone and tell Hugo the Hammer. Then I was to find you.

"But Hugo and all his host had been sent to harry the Bishop of Cefalu for refusing to pay his fleet-tax, even before Christodoulos passed Corleone. So, leaving word, I hastened back and have found you."

"It has taken you long enough."

"Let this excuse me, seignior." He handed Ian a tiny roll of parchment, sealed with the seal of Khaled ben-Zobair. Within was written in Arabic:

Peace be upon you, my brother. One who shall not be named tells me the Madhi imself is in Sicily and will pass through the Valley of the Moon, with a single guide, on the night of the full moon. I shall intercept him. He who brings this will guide you to the valley. If there is treachery, your swords may repay the debt you say you owe me. There will be but four with me. Do not attack Christodoulos in Rocco Forte, for you can not take the castle without engines. Farewell.

"How came this into your hand?" Ian asked the Sicilian.

"In Rocca Forte town lives one who breeds pigeons," he answered enigmatically.

"Are you of the secret police?" the Scot demanded.

"I am Gian the peasant, whom men call the One-Handed, hater of tyrants, helper of my friends. The vizier, Khaled, does not scorn my aid."

"Do you know the way to the Valley of the Moon?"

"Often have I hidden there, in the old days, from Gaimar the Grim."

"Up, lads!" Ian cried to his clansmen. "This is the night of the full moon! We go!"

A SEMI-CIRCLE of black-robed figures stood in the Valley of the Moon. Before them was a group of four men, in white, bound back to back with cords. Standing alone before them all was one black-robed like the others, but with his face hidden by a black mask. As the mist grew luminous above the eastern hills, he spoke in a deep vibrant voice:

"Khaled ben-Zobair, before your soul flies to Eblis, I will punish you as neither death nor torments could. I will torture your soul with full knowledge and send it to hell crying out against Allah!

"You masqueraded as one of us. You learned that my ships are coming from the African coast. You guessed, but did not know, that they would land at Rocca Forte. Learn now that they will do so within a fortnight.

"You did not know that five thousand Berber spearmen are even now scattered through this island. You did not know that my word has been preached in every village, that every town is sown with those who, at the given time, will slay the king's officers. You dream not that when Sicily is mine, I will send my soldiers into Italy, across the Alps, into the heart of Europe, a vast counter-crusade against the crusades of the Christians. From Africa to the North Sea, from Spain to Syria, they who believe shall blot out the cross and raise the banner of the prophet from every desecrated church."

At that moment, the moon rose clear of the mist. A sharp whistle rang through the valley. Steel flashed on every side. With a ferocious yell, the Highlanders surged in

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upon the black-robed ring of Almohades.

Ian had marked the Mahdi for his own and, before the Moslem could draw his simitar, tore the black mask from his face.

"Allah!" shouted the bound Khaled. "It is al-Mokhtar!"

As he spoke, the Mahdi leaped backward into a dense growth of hazel. Ian sprang after, clutching a corner of his robe, and found himself holding an empty black burnoose. The Mahdi was gone.

While the Highlanders raged through the valley like a whirlwind, giving no quarter, Ian hastened to cut the bonds of Khaled and the three who had come with him. Laying his hand on the shoulder of the nearest, he touched the soft flesh of a woman. It was Gulnar.

"A good blow struck for Sicily!" Khaled wrung his deliverer's hand. "Now to the tower where the Almohades tethered our horses together with their own."

Leaving the black-robed dead behind, the Scots and those they had saved crossed the valley to where more than a hundred horses grazed at the foot of a stately Roman ruin. Khaled and his followers mounted at once.

"Where do you ride?" asked Ian.

"To Palermo to rouse the king. I left him shut up in his study, poring over a problem the Spanish sage had set him. He is trying to discover, by algebra, what was the language spoken in the Garden of Eden, but when he learns that his teacher is none other than the Mahdi, he will call out the feudal army and fall on the Almohades like a tempest."

"Go if you must," Ian answered. "I shall lead my men to Rocca Forte, retake the castle and hang Christodoulos from the battlements."

"You will fail," Khaled prophesied, "for you have neither archers nor siege-engines. Rocca Forte must wait till Roger can summon the feudal host."

"And by that time the Berber host will have landed there," declared Ian. "We must first of all win back the castle. Since I have failed in my promise to hold it, I will retake the fortress or die beneath its walls."

"Then I go with you," Khaled decided and turned to his companions. "Ride to the king, Yusuf, and tell him all that we have learned to-night. You, Ibrahim, hasten to Cefalu. Bid Hugo leave the bishop in peace and ride to Palermo with all his spears. The Mahdi will doubtless strive to keep us in a turmoil there till his fleet makes land. You, Noureddin, speed to Corleone, in case Hugo has already returned home, with the same message."

Gulnar, her head hanging, asked wearily—

"What will you do with me, son of Zobair?"

Khaled looked at her sadly.

"You must ride to Rocca Forte with the Seignior Ian and me. If my brother consents, you and I will linger a little behind the host, for I have much to say to you."

The Scots, who had learned to ride on their own hill-ponies, mounted the captured horses and rode off down the valley under Gian's guidance. An hour later they emerged from a dense donax thicket on to the Palermo highway, about half-way between Rocca Forte and the Pass of Blood.

Last of all, rode Khaled and Gulnar. The moonlit night was soft and beautiful, fragrant with the smell of the rain gathering in the light clouds overhead.

"Ah, Gulnar," said Khaled softly. "You have made an ill return for the love I gave you. I have loved you long—since I first saw you, poor and friendless, among the silk-weavers. You could not guess what joy you brought me when you came to me in Palermo four short days ago and told me that you returned my love. Yes, even though I but half-believed you, I rejoiced, and you were beguiling me to my death."

The girl was silent, her face averted. After a moment, he continued:

"When you told me how you saved Ian Dhu from death and swore that you did so because he was my friend, you almost convinced me that you spoke the truth and loved me indeed. Your arms were about my neck, the fragrance of your hair was sweet as the flowers of paradise. Though I only half-believed, I went with you to ambush and capture. Why do you hate me so?"

"I do not hate you!" she sobbed.

"If you do not hate me, then the only thing that could have driven you to such baseness was fear. The Mahdi must have plucked you forth from Rocca Forte and threatened you with death, unless you betrayed me into his hands. Is this the truth?"

"But half the truth," she answered. "But why did you come with me if you only half-believed?"

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Khaled smiled wearily.

"Because I knew you might be false and, if you failed, the Mahdi would surely kill you. It would be my life or yours and I would make the sacrifice willingly."

Gulnar turned a white face to his.

"But your men?" she cried. "But Sicily? If you should perish, the Almohades——"

"Yes, I knew. My life was mine to give for you; my country I could not sacrifice, so I sent word to Ian Dhu——"

"Then you told him——"

"Only that there might be danger. I did not say to him and I shall never say to any one that it was you who betrayed me. If he asks how you got away from Rocca Forte and why you were with me, I shall tell him that I sent for you and have kept you with me, to protect you from the vengeance of the Mahdi. He will believe, for he trusts you and is not the man to question one to whom he owes so great a debt."

For a little she rode on without speaking; then she said:

"You must think me base, indeed. If the Mahdi had threatened me alone, I would never have imperiled your life to save mine, but he swore to kill not only me, but the man I love."

"Ian Dhu?"

She nodded and then presently told the truth of what had happened in the villa of the Almohades—how she had trapped Ian into promising to marry her. Khaled's eyes were fierce with scorn.

"You would have won him by trickery and afterward have kept his life for yourself by betraying his friend? Does such love deserve happiness? Are you worthy to be his wife?"

Gulnar returned his gaze steadily.

"Tonight," she said, "I have learned how great love can be and how great it can make the soul of a man who loves as you do. I will strive to be worthy of the lesson."

As the sun rose, Dugall reined in his mount and pointed to a chestnut-grove on their left. Ian nodded.

"Normans," he commented. "I can see the light on their lance-points where the branches are bare."

He cried an order in Gaelic and the Scots wheeled and galloped a hundred yards up the long, broken slope on their right, dismounted and drew their swords. A column of mounted Norman men-at-arms rode out from the grove. At the sight of the Highlanders, the Norman leader, a slender man in full mail, cried in a high, fierce voice:

"On! For Rocca Forte and the king!"

Recognizing the voice, Ian ran forward to meet them.

"Gui!" he shouted. "Well met!"

But with an oath, Gui lowered his lance and thrust the spurs into his horse's sides. For a moment Ian stood still in sheer surprize; then, crying his men back, he turned and fled up the wooded slope. In obedience to his shouted order, the clansmen likewise turned their backs on the charging horsemen and scaled the stony hillside at a pace no cavalry could equal. Behind them thirty lowered lances glittered evilly in the morning light.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ASSAULT

THE Scots kept easily ahead. Baffled and angry, Gui pulled up and shouted—

"Stop, coward, and fight me like a man!"

At once every Highlander turned to take up the challenge, but Ian, descending to the edge of a rocky terrace before which the Provençal had reined in, waved his men back.

"What quarrel have you with me?" he demanded. "Turn your spears against the traitors in Rocca Forte. Call me not coward; it has cost me too much pride already to yield a foot of ground to you!"

Gui, half-mad with jealousy, thrust at him savagely. With a swing of his sword, Ian cut the lance asunder and then sprang at his opponent, dragged him from the saddle and flung him prostrate on the ground. The Norman troopers dared not strike, for Ian's *skean-dhu* was at their leader's throat.

Khaled now rode up with Gulnar and calmly addressed the prostrate Gui:

"Young man, you are on the verge of plunging six score better men into bloodshed. In the king's name I forbid this folly!"

"By what authority do you forbid, dog of a Moslem?"

"By the king's, whose vizier I am—by authority enough to hang you!"

Sobered by this, Gui bade his men raise their points. At once Ian released him.

"What is your quarrel with me?" he asked again.

Pointing to Gulnar, Gui answered—

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"You have stolen the Lady Fulvia's love and flouted her for a Moslem woman."

To hear Fulvia's name thus bandied about in the presence of common spearmen was more than Ian could endure.

"Unless you withdraw your words at once," he cried, "I will beat you as one beats a slave!"

Gui leaped at him with an oath. The two grappled, but the lighter Provençal was hurled over the Highlander's shoulder and flung on the ground with such force that he lay senseless. When he recovered consciousness, he smiled wryly and said—

"Forgive me, Seignior Ian; my words were ungentle and unjust."

Ian's fury melted. Stooping, he raised Gui, who was shaken but not much hurt.

"I have never spoken of love to the countess, and this lady here is betrothed to me. Christodoulos, who holds the castle with three hundred men, is a traitor; it is your duty and mine to rescue the Lady Fulvia from his hands. Without your thirty spears the attack might well be hopeless."

"Hopeless enough at best," Gui grimaced. "The garrison is not three hundred but five, the castle is strong and Jaufré has been sent off to Castrocavalli with forty good men who might have aided us."

Khaled flung up his hands.

"*Kismet!*" he cried. "It is useless!"

But Ian's lips set in a grim line.

"Useless or not, I will try. Jaufré, I know, will not sit idle when he hears of his lady's plight."

"I will send a horseman to Castrocavalli at once!" cried Gui. "In three days Jaufré will be here."

Gian, the One-Handed, came forward and spoke:

"There are five hundred peasants at Castrocavalli who once bore arms for Gaimar the Grim. Gladly would they die for the Lady Fulvia who freed them. I will ride with your horseman and bring back my comrades."

"Now we have the men," said Khaled, "but no siege-engines."

"We shall not need them," declared Ian. "I have thought of a better way. In the mean while, this is a good camping-place. Let the men gather boughs for huts and grass to thatch them, for the rains are coming."

THE rains came that night. For three days they fell with increasing fury. The third night, when the storm was at its worst, the guard in the barbican at the foot of the ramp leading up to Rocca Forte castle heard the plashing of hoofs and the jingle of chain mail.

"Who comes?" rang the challenge.

"Gui de la Garde and his prisoners, the Scottish outlaws!"

The Moslem captain of the guard leaned over the barbican parapet with a torch. Its light was reflected by the streaming armor of Gui's men-at-arms and revealed the sullen faces and bound arms of the Highlanders.

"Enter, O Valiant One!" he cried in welcome. "Ali, speed to the castle-gate with the good news and bid them prepare to lower the drawbridge!"

Preceded by the eager Ali, the long wet column wound its way up the ramp. Those below could hear the perfunctory challenge and loud shouts of rejoicing from within the castle and the hollow tramp of Gui's horses across the lowered drawbridge.

At the sound, a dozen shaggy heads rose unseen above the parapet of the ramp between the first and second angles above the barbican. It was Gian the One-Handed and a picked party of his peasants. Under cover of the storm and Gui's open approach, they had brought up and planted long, light ladders, carefully padded at the ends.

When all had mounted, they ran swiftly and silently down the ramp, and burst into the unguarded inner side of the barbican. Never dreaming of assault from the direction of the castle, the Moslem guard were speedily overwhelmed. The victorious peasants flung open the gates. Out of the darkness, from where they had lain in ambush a bow-shot distant, came the rest of Gian's five hundred, led by Jaufré and his forty mounted men-at-arms. Eagerly they dashed in through the gate and up the long ramp toward the castle, whence now came cries of terror and the ring of steel on steel.

As soon as he and his pretended prisoners were admitted to the bailey, Gui spurred across the court, drove his lance through first one and then the other of the two Berbers who had just lowered the drawbridge and raised the portcullis leading into the great hall. Dismounting, he hewed the handle from one windlass with his sword,

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while one of his men did the same to the others that governed the drawbridge and portcullis across the outer moat. Neither portcullis could now be lowered, neither drawbridge raised.

Their shouts of triumph turning to yells of consternation, the garrison sprang to arms, but they were badly disposed for defense. Most of them had left their posts to hasten to the courtyard to welcome Gui's return with his prisoners.

Bursting their nearly severed bonds, the Scots drew their swords and charged straight across the bailey, over the inner drawbridge, and fell upon the Moslems now thronging out of the great hall. Gui and his dismounted men-at-arms locked shields and formed a wedge between the Highlanders and the raging fanatics now pouring out of the barracks which lined the bailey.

The great hall and the keep of Rocca Forte formed a fortress within a fortress, separated from the open courtyard of the bailey by a dry moat, deep and wide. Only by the drawbridge could it be crossed, and the outer end of the bridge was held by Gui's phalanx.

Within the hall, Ian's broadswords made short work of the forty or so Almohades they met and drove back in through the archway. Over the last of their mangled foemen the Highlanders dashed through the hall to the stairway leading up into the keep.

At the first turn of the stair, Ian came face to face with Christodoulos. Roused from sleep by the news of Gui's return, he had been dressing when he heard the shouts of joy change to battle-cries. The renegade was no coward. Donning his armor, he was speeding to the fray when he met Ian. Before Christodoulos could raise his simitar, Ian's fist struck him on the chin, knocking him senseless. Leaving him there, the Scots pressed on up the stair.

Without, the bailey was a roaring sea of raging men and gleaming weapons. Their eyeballs rolling, their beards foam-flecked, the fanatics pressed forward to the very edge of the moat, but only at the center, where the long drawbridge met the masonry, could they get at the hated Nazarenes.

There Gui and his thirty met fanatic fury with cool, disciplined valor. Covered with their long kite-shaped shields, the front rank cut and thrust with their heavy swords, while those behind plied their long lances. Wave after wave of Moslems, slashing with simitars, stabbing with light spears and daggers, rolled up, broke and crumbled away. But still they came on, over their own dead. Torches, the raindrops hissing in their flames, lit the scene with a lurid glare.

Some of those standing at the edge of the moat, on either side of the bridge, cast light javelins with Moorish skill. A man-at-arms went down with a barbed shaft through his eye and brain. Archers in the front of the Almohade throng cried to those behind to give them room to draw. Gui, standing at the apex of the wedge, felt his sword turn on a Berber helmet; the next instant an iron mace struck it from his hand. Two more of his men were down, the rest striking wearily. Inch by inch the Normans were driven back across the drawbridge.

"Rocca Forte! Rocca Forte!"

In through the outer gate and across the bailey swept Jaufré and his forty mounted men-at-arms, lances couched for the charge. With a rending crash they struck the dense mass of Moslems. The twenty-foot lances bored through packed masses of flesh, the iron-shod horses trampled over the dead and the living.

Penned between stone walls, their backs to the fearful force that smote them so suddenly, the Almohades were sent hurtling forward. Javelin-men and archers, standing on the unrailed edge of the moat, pitched headlong into the abyss. Those that escaped having their limbs shattered or their brains dashed out on the stones below were crushed by those falling after them or impaled on the weapons of those who had already fallen.

By tens and twenties the Moslems were driven over the edge of the moat. Casting aside their cumbered lances, Jaufré and his troopers drew their heavy swords. From the vantage of their saddles they drove in smashing back-strokes, splitting skulls and severing arms. Unable to turn against this destruction, the Berbers pressed forward in terror, each man fighting only to gain the shelter of the hall. Moslem stabbed Moslem on the crammed and creaking drawbridge; the moat was two-thirds full of dead and dying.

Then Jaufré, drunk with slaughter, made a mistake that cost good Christian lives. Driving his spurs home, he urged his great charger straight at the crowded drawbridge. His men followed; by sheer weight they

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forced a passage through the shrieking Berbers, who rolled off the bridge to right and left, or died beneath the iron hoofs and the Norman blades. A struggle in the archway, a grinding surge, and they burst into the hall.

The great room was thronged with Berbers, save where, at the far end, Gui and the eighteen men still left to him held the stair leading up into the keep. The smooth mosaic floor, already slippery with blood, was an ill place for horsemanship. Two horses slipped and fell. At that, and the realization of how few were their foes, the Saracens came surging back. Many ducked under the bellies of the horses, stabbing upward or hamstringing. The Norman swords fell as fast and as heavily as before, but ever and again horse and rider went down to be buried under a pile of hacking, cursing Moslems.

AS THE Highlanders pressed on up the tower stair, a great stone came crashing down from above. A second, bounding from the wall, swept a red-bearded clansman from his feet with a smashed leg. With one united bellow of rage, the Scots rounded the last turn and sprang for the opening of the parapeted roof.

Stones smashed down upon them; molten lead sprayed searingly over them; swords and spears were thrust down at them, but the great blade of Dugall flashed in the opening and Ian sprang through. His sword made clearance, and Dugall followed.

Fifty Berber warriors leaped at them from all sides, but all who came within the sweep of the Highland swords went down with fearful wounds. More clansmen followed; the jam of struggling men became so thick that there was no room for the Scottish swords, nor for more of the Highlanders on the crowded roof. The Moors, exultant in their foes' inability to wield those awful blades, redoubled their strokes.

Dropping their swords, the Scots drew their *skean-dhus*. Never had such knife-play been seen. The Berbers were as dismayed as they had been by the six-foot broadswords. Wrestling, stabbing, striking with knee and fist, the combatants fought terribly, while the Scots unable to find room on the roof cursed bitterly below.

But one of them, a *duniwassal* who still bore in his steel cap the bedraggled eagle's feather he had brought from home, bellowed a command. With a yell of savage joy they ran down the stair and hurled themselves into the thick of the fight now raging in the hall.

At the same moment, Gian the One-Handed and his five hundred peasants came pouring in through the outer gate. Sweeping like a flood over the knots of Berber fighting-men still lingering in the corners of the bailey, they rushed into the great hall from one end as the Highlanders rushed in from the other. Hemmed in and outnumbered, the last of the Almohade garrison gasped out their lives.

The fight on the tower-top was likewise at an end. Fifty Moslems had held the keep; fifty corpses lay on the crimson stones. Not a Scot had perished; a dozen were badly slashed or stabbed, but their skill with their frightful weapons and their great strength had guarded their lives well. They leaned on their swords, taking great breaths, while the rain washed their wounds gratefully.

The clamor of battle had given place to a ghastly silence. Then came the exultant shout of many voices.

"Fulvia! Fulvia and Rocca Forte!"

As it died away, there rang from the stair the sudden clang of steel. Scot and Norman rushed toward it from all sides. It was Ian Dhu who arrived first.

On the corridor of the second floor, he found two warriors fighting desperately. Both were in Saracen mail; one, agile and slender, drove in two thrusts with a light, straight blade for every slash of the other's simitar. The slender warrior's back was toward Ian as he approached. Bringing the flat of his long sword down on the simitar-wielder's head, he caught the agile form in his strong arms and held it, crying:

"Yield! You are my prisoner!"

Ian turned the slender form irresistibly about in his great arms till the face met his. It was covered by a mask of steel mesh over velvet, but the eyes that glowed in the half-light through the ringed eye-holes were those of no warrior. He relaxed his grasp, and his captive reached out one slender hand and threw off the helmet just as Jaufré appeared and cried—

"Fulvia!"

And Fulvia it was, in splendid mail and corselet of rare Saracen plate. As she looked into Ian's eyes, the sword dropped from her hand.

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"How came you here?" Jaufré asked with anxious severity.

"I heard the fighting and wished to see, so I put on the armor I won a year ago from Riccoberto when he sought to seize me by force, but, as I opened the door, this man, whom Christodoulos had left to guard me, tried to stop me. I thrust at him, and he struck back. I outfenced him, but his strength was wearing me down when Seignior Ian saved me."

"Some day your love for action will bring you to your death, my lady," said Jaufré as he ran his dagger through the prostrate Berber's throat. "It is my pleasure to report that the castle is won."

"My grateful thanks to you, to all my brave fellows and to this gallant Scot," she answered. Ian, remembering how she had sent him away, asked bluntly—

"Am I welcome here, lady countess?"

Fulvia smiled.

"You are always welcome. Even when my lips offended, in my heart I welcomed you."

CHAPTER XV

THE COUNTERSTROKE

THERE was need of a physician for the wounded and one came with speed. At the first sound of fighting, Ibn Hawwas had left his hiding-place in the Moslem fishers' village across the harbor, mustered the few fighting-men left there and led them to the fray. But though they rowed their fastest, they arrived too late to take active part.

Hawwas entered the castle on the heels of the rear-guard, together with Gulnar and her escort Khaled. As they mounted the stair of the keep, one lying in the darkness groaned and stirred. Hawwas bent down and turned the face of the sufferer to the torchlight. It was Christodoulos.

"Leave him to me," said Khaled.

Stripping the renegade of his weapons, he raised him in his sinewy arms, bore him into the nearest room and closed the door. Placing him on the bed, Khaled sat on the floor, drew out his writing-case and wrote busily. When Christodoulos opened his eyes, he trembled to see standing over him the vizier of secret police.

"Read!" commanded Khaled, handing him a written scroll. "Then sign!"

Christodoulos read. The scroll shook in his fingers; his parched tongue licked his dry lips. It was a full confession of his intrigue with the Mahdi, a declaration that but for Ian Dhu Mackay his treachery would have succeeded.

His eyes, frightened but venomous, sought Khaled's stern face.

"If I refuse?" he asked.

"Torture!"

Shaking as with an ague, Christodoulos signed. Khaled clapped his hands thrice and two spearmen entered.

"Chain him to a post in the lowest dungeon!"

The dead had been buried and the castle cleansed as thoroughly as possible, but its former beauty had departed. The crimson splashes on floor and walls had turned to a rusty brown no scrubbing could wash out; the glorious tapestries were slashed and stained. An atmosphere of death hung over Rocca Forte, darkened by the oncoming shadow of black Berber sails.

Fulvia alone seemed untouched by the gloom. To Ian's astonishment, she showed toward both him and Gulnar the greatest friendliness. More than once, as they inspected the fortifications together, Fulvia tortured his eager heart with glances that a man free to love would have given his life for.

Young Gui de la Garde saw this but no longer seemed to resent it. The truth was that he had grown to manhood in the last few days. He appreciated, for the first time, a man better than himself. The wound in his heart pained him more than the one he had received in his arm, but he was honestly glad to see the happiness in Fulvia's eyes and to know that Ian was the cause. As for the Scot's betrothal to Gulnar, she was a Moslem; between her and a Christian there could be no talk of marriage.

Gulnar herself was by Ibn Hawwas's orders confined to bed. The mental and physical strain of her late adventures, combined with exposure to the cold rain, had brought on a slight fever. Fulvia cared for her most tenderly.

The unhappiest man in the castle was Basil Heraclides. After the battle he had been found, fully armed, hiding in a great chest in his laboratory. That the whole garrison knew this troubled him less than his loss of self-esteem. The little Byzantine knew he was a coward and, longing

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with all his soul to be like the stern warriors about him, ate out his heart with self-contempt. The Normans mocked; the clansmen passed him by in meaning silence. By Ian alone was he still treated with courtesy.

THE day after the battle, Khaled took a casual stroll through the Greek town. He lingered a moment in front of a crumbling windmill about whose idle vanes fluttered a flock of pigeons. The next day, as he passed the same spot, he was accosted by a wizened Greek lazing in the shadow of the mill.

"Will my lord buy a pigeon? There are none finer in the kingdom. They are long-winged birds and of sure flight."

"I know little about them," Khaled answered, "but if you have wine, I will drink with you, for it is hot. The air promises a sirocco."

"Aye, it is the desert-wind that has driven away the rain. Come inside, noble lord, and I will draw drink."

The mill was empty, save for a few mats, some broken jars on a shelf and the pigeons that flew in and out, but, from a recess in the wall, the Greek drew a wine-jar, two earthen cups and a cedar box. The wine that Khaled drank from the poor cups was the purest Catanian. From the cedar box the Greek took a tiny roll of parchment.

"The pedigree of my pigeons," he announced.

"Let me take it with me to study at leisure. Here are two bezants. If I do not buy, keep them for your trouble."

With the scroll hidden in his turban, Khaled went out. Aimlessly he strolled about the town and beach; then he returned slowly to the castle and asked for the countess.

It was a sober if somewhat excited group that met a few moments later in Ian's chamber, the closed door of which was guarded by two stalwart Highlanders. Fulvia occupied the only seat. About her stood Khaled, Ian, Dugall, Hawwas, Heraclides and Jaufré.

"The Mahdi has struck," announced Khaled gravely. "His agents have been preaching openly in the markets and winning many converts. There have been gatherings at night. Two loyal cadis and a wali have been murdered. The Moorish quarter is buzzing with rumors and afire with excitement. Hugo the Hammer has not reached the city. This—" he tapped the scroll he had brought from the pigeon-fancier—"is a report from Yusuf, whom I sent to Palermo."

"But the king?" Fulvia exclaimed. "Has he done nothing?"

"The king is in his study, lost in scholarship. Guarded by armed and faithful mutes, he denies himself to every one until his work is finished. My man was unable to reach him. Roger knows not that al-Mokhtar is the Mahdi, knows not the death that hovers about him and his land."

"Why did not your fellow push the mutes aside and force his way in?" Ian asked impatiently. "Must Sicily perish because its king is a scholar?"

"You know little of our king," Khaled retorted. "If his own brother presumed to disturb his studies, the guards would cut him down and Roger would reward them for it. I myself shall go to Palermo at once and ask admittance, but, if it is refused, there is nothing to be done. Without the king's own order, the feudal host can not be mobilized, and none can approach Roger to report the peril to him."

Fulvia's eyes flashed. "Is there no man brave enough to risk death," she demanded, "on the chance that the king will hear him?"

"It is not a question of courage," Khaled answered. "He who persisted in passing the mutes would die beneath their simitars before the king knew of his presence beyond the barred door. Till the problem be solved, Roger not only works but sleeps in the study; his food is passed in through the wall by a cunning device. No sound can penetrate his study-walls."

After a moment's silence, Ian said:

"There is one way to manage this, Khaled. While the admiral, George of Antioch, is away and the army not yet summoned, is not your palace guard the only organized force in the city? Why not order them to seize the mutes and force the king's door?"

Khaled shook his head.

"I might give the order, but they would not dare obey. Not even the secret police would dare defy the king's order openly. Roger is a lion when roused."

"Then," said Ian, "I will go to Palermo with you, at the head of forty of my own lads. That will leave as many more unwounded here to strengthen the garrison. Once in the city, do you keep your palace

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guards from interfering. I will overpower the mutes, break in the door of Roger's study and force him to listen to me. When he knows the truth, he will be man enough to take action."

"But you will die!" cried Fulvia. "His first act will be to have you and your men put to the torture."

"It is as the Lady Fulvia says," Khaled affirmed. "You would go to your death, my brother."

But Ian only smiled with something that was almost joy.

"If so, I will die that Sicily—and that which I value more—may live, and I will be facing death in the open. I am tired of hiding in the hills. I have skulked from your king till I am weary of it. Now I am going to him as one man to another. I shall tell him: 'Look, thou! This city is in revolt; this land is menaced with destruction. The spearmen of the Mahdi are within thy gates; his fleets approach thy shores. Rouse thyself like a man!' If I succeed, it is worth the risk; if I fail, I shall be doomed anyway. I would as lief be slain by Roger, the Christian, as by the Almohades."

"Suppose you are slain and the king does not call out the army?" Hawwas hazarded.

"No," Khaled answered, "that will not be. The weakness of Roger is his love of learning, but once prove to him that Sicily is in danger, he will leave the study for the camp. And once in the field, no king or emperor can stand against him. The difficulty will be in getting access to him. Ian may die in the attempt. If so, all is lost. We must weigh the cost well, balancing our lives against the salvation of the island."

Fulvia rose, with pale cheeks but gleaming eyes.

"Our lives matter little," she declared, "against the thousands of lives our deaths may save. We nobles are too apt to forget that God has placed us over the people to protect them. If we fail and the people perish, what answer shall we make to God? Let Ian Dhu go to Palermo and reach the king if he can. We have enough men here now to hold the castle against the Berbers, and Christodoulos has provisioned it well."

"But Castrocavalli?" interrupted Jaufré anxiously.

"Let it go. If we are beaten, we shall die and Castrocavalli will be of no use to us then; if we win, we can retake it at leisure."

While Fulvia was speaking, Ian had been whispering to Heraclides. The Greek nodded and Ian addressed the countess:

"Lady Fulvia, you have decided to risk all upon my success, to trust your own fate and that of Sicily to me. Trust me a little further, if you can. Has the chain across the harbor been repaired since I cut it with my sword?"

Fulvia smiled.

"Before you were well on the road to Palermo with Hugo the Hammer, divers were raising the ends. It is as strong as before you first came."

"Then," Ian resumed, "when the Berber fleet appears, if I have not yet returned, raise the chain and admit them to the harbor."

Fulvia stared at him in amazement. Jaufré, puzzled and angry, broke in with an oath—

"Blood of the martyrs, Seignior Scot, if I did not know you to be honest, I should call you a traitor for such advice!"

Ian did not heed the angry words; his eyes sought and held those of Fulvia. She shook her head.

"You do not understand our methods of warfare," she protested. "We can hold them outside with that chain while our engines shower stones and darts upon them. But if we let them in, they could land with slight loss, blockade the castle and press on to Palermo."

"I can not explain now the reason for my request," Ian replied. "If it became known to the garrison, some one might talk and the spies of the Mahdi learn of it. Therefore I can only ask you to trust me, to lower the chain deep enough for the Berber keels to pass safely over it, and then to entrust the command of the garrison to Heraclides."

Jaufré laughed shortly and bitterly.

"To Heraclides!" he mocked. "A brave commander indeed! Why not to Christodoulos?"

But Fulvia bade him be silent and gave Ian her hand.

"Since you ask it, I agree," she conceded. "I will not even ask your reason. I know you to be a brave and honorable man and that is enough. But I pray, if you live, hasten back to us!"

As the council broke up, Heraclides turned to Jaufré with an air of pompous dignity.

"You presumed to link my name with

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that of the traitor Christodoulos," he said severely. "I will not hold it against you, for you are but an ignorant man-at-arms and can not be expected to recognize the value of strategy. I may be a poor swordsman, but where you fight with your hands I fight with my head."

"Aye, hidden in a chest!" Jaufré gibed, and the Byzantine bit his lip.

AS THE mountains on their left reared their huge bulk between the highway and Rocca Forte, Ian and Khaled turned in their saddles to look back toward the castle. The keep alone was visible now; soon it too would sink behind the mountain wall. The keen eyes of the mountaineer caught a tiny glint of color on the tower, tawny-golden in the bright sunlight, and his heart was content. Let what might meet him in Palermo, he would carry with him to the last the memory of that long look backward and of Fulvia watching him on his way. He rode on with the consciousness of greater strength, of renewed self-confidence. He did not know the thoughts in Khaled's breast, nor was he curious.

When they had ridden farther, Khaled spoke:

"This will be a perilous errand for us all, my brother. Death may not wait till you try to force the King's study; it may strike us down in the city gate. I know something of Italian revolts and of Moslem mobs. The Mahdi has planned a shrewd counterstroke to your attack in the Valley of the Moon."

Ian's lips smiled, though his eyes were grim.

"The lads who drew first blood there know how to parry the shrewdest strokes," he answered. "If we fail, we shall not die alone."

CHAPTER XVI

THE LION WAKES

"HORSEMEN ahead!"

"Normans," answered Khaled coolly.

"How can you tell that?" asked Ian.

The night was doubly dark with the sirocco. Borne across from Africa by the stifling wind, millions of tiny dust-particles swirled through the air, sifting through mail and clothing, shutting out the stars. The desert-wind had driven away the rains; it was hot and suffocating. On such a night nerves are stretched till a trifle may bring men to blows or fan the sparks of discontent into rebellion.

"That measured clang is the beat of heavy Norman shields upon mailed backs," responded Khaled. They are near, by the sound."

"Halt!" Ian ordered the column of mounted Highlanders behind. From the gloom ahead came an answering shout in Norman French:

"*Volte face!* To the rear! Down lances! In the king's name, who comes?"

Ian, being a proclaimed outlaw, wisely left it to Khaled to reply:

"Khaled ben-Zobair with a Christian escort!"

"Well met, Khaled!" Hoofs clattered on the road and a huge form loomed up in the dark. "Which of you is Khaled?" he asked.

"Hugo of Corleone!" cried the Arab. "I did not recognize your voice through the dust. So you got my message?"

"That is why I am on the march for Palermo now with five hundred men. I took enough horses from the Bishop of Cefalu to mount all my infantry. Who are these with you?"

"You should know me, Seignior Hugo," Ian answered for himself.

"Saint Michael and the dragon!" gasped Hugo. "Where trouble lies, there you will find a Scot. Why, man, the Mahdi himself would be safer in Palermo than you!"

"The Mahdi will not be safe there or elsewhere when my lads set eyes on him," Ian retorted. "As for myself, I am not looking for safety."

Briefly, while Hugo cursed in three languages, Ian told him of Christodoulos, Rocca Forte and the revolt in Palermo.

"Pray God the rebels are not in force enough to hold the space between the outer walls and the *galga*," Hugo commented, "for then we should be cut off both from the palace and the heart of the city!"

"I do not fear that," Khaled assured him. "Not many of the five thousand Berbers the Mahdi boasted he already had in Sicily could have been brought in while the palace guard still hold the outer and inner gates. I fear an uprising of honest Moslems, befooled and misled by the Almohades."

"How can that be?" asked Hugo skeptically.

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"Did not the Mahdi's agents, through Christodoulos, raise a mob against Dugall Mor on the Kemonia Bridge when Dugall was masquerading as his master? The mob was made up of loyal Moslems, honestly believing that one of their faith had been wantonly attacked by a crusader. How easy for the Almohades to stir up feeling against the Seignior Ian who, as a crusader, is held to be an enemy of Islam and is also known to be under the king's displeasure! The Mahdi's agents need say only that those Moslem officials who have just been murdered at the Mahdi's own command were killed by the Scots and that the Normans connived at it."

"Moslem officials murdered!" gasped Hugo. "When? How?"

"Two days ago. Doubtless the Mahdi has been persuading my fellow Moslems that they were slain by the wiles of the crusader, Ian Dhu Mackay."

"There will be fine rioting, then," Hugo commented. "You Moors are fiends for street fighting."

"True," Khaled answered. "Let us make haste. The sooner we reach the city, the fewer will perish."

DAWN found them at the city gates. Both there and at the gate of the *galga*, the guard stared at the Scots but let them pass at Khaled's word.

"How is it in the city?" he asked the officer of the guard at the *galga* gate. "Does the king know yet?"

"The king knows nothing; he is still in his study. Among the Greeks and Italians all is quiet; in the *kemonia* and among the Moslems there is riot and confusion. Barricades have been raised; Christian shops and dwellings looted. The Mahdi's preachers harangue on every corner."

"What say they?" asked Khaled.

"That the king has been poisoned by a servant in the pay of the Scots, and that certain Normans connived at the deed. It is this that has set the people on fire."

"What Normans do they accuse?"

"The Lady Fulvia, Hugo the Hammer and all Normans who are in the city."

Hugo grew purple.

"What? I poison the king?"

"How has the *galga* been kept quiet?" asked Khaled. "I hear no tumult."

"Ali Hassan, chief counselor of the curia, has closed the gates against the malcontents and manned the walls with the one company of archers left in Palermo, under Ibn Abdallah."

"Hassan has done well," Khaled commented. "Ibn Abdallah is faithful to the death. Now let us to work. Hugo, if you enter the Moslem quarter now, they will fill you with arrows from behind their barricades. Take your squadron to the gate at the Bridge of the Ethiopians. Hold them there, ready to charge out and across the bridge when I send the word. But first I will call out all of the palace guard, not on duty at the wall, to support you. Wait here till I return."

He rode in through the gate, beyond which the others could see, rising above the wall, the towers of the palace. Presently they heard a trumpet blown within. There came the clash of cymbals, the throb of drums and the cadenced tramp of infantry marching away in the direction of the Bridge of the Ethiopians.

"The guard have marched," said Khaled as he came forth again. "The secret police already have their orders. Seignior Hugo, to your post. Seignior Ian, follow me with your men."

He led the Scots in through the now unguarded portals of the palace, and up through deserted stairs and corridors to the level of the topmost story, till they came to a great empty room they had never seen before.

"The hall of the Lombards," Khaled said to Ian. "It is part of the original fortress of Robert Guiscard. None but the king and his faithful mutes may pass that door. Beyond it is the anteroom of his study; there you will find the mutes on guard. Now I must leave you; if you win through safely, you will find me with the palace guard in the *kemonia*. Draw your swords, and may Allah go with you!"

Sword in hand, Ian strode across to the forbidden door and flung it open. His men crowded through after him. Before them they saw a second doorway, guarded by a score of Egyptian slaves in Saracen chain mail with heavy simitars and shields of rhinoceros-hide.

At the sight of the strange armed giants, the loyal mutes sprang bravely to the attack. Ian cried out in Arabic, but the Egyptians could neither speak nor hear; there was no choice but to fight. The flat of his

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broadsword knocked the first slave senseless, and the unheard-of size of the Highland blades made the rest hesitate.

Bestriding the man he had struck down, Ian made signs to the mutes to let him pass. They shook their heads and stood their ground. Regretfully Ian gave the command to strike. The hungry broadswords lashed out. Four Egyptians dropped, horribly mangled. Before the Scots could recover their ponderous weapons, the mutes charged in. Their curved blades cut through mail and flesh. Two of the Scots went down, badly wounded.

The sight of his men's blood steeled Ian's heart. He drove his blade through helmet, skull and neck of the nearest mute; Dugall Mor's enormous weapon cut down two with a single blow. For the space of two seconds the chop of steel and the savage shouts of the clansmen rang out together. Then, casting aside their simitars, the few surviving mutes flung themselves on their knees.

Ian studied the door the Egyptians had so faithfully guarded. It was of massive oak, banded with iron, sealed at the edges with strips of felt. He rapped loudly, but there was no answer; then he threw his weight upon it, but it did not stir.

Stepping aside, Ian beckoned to Dugall, who launched himself against the oak with all his strength. His shoulder struck it fairly, but he recoiled, rubbing himself ruefully.

With a low-voiced command, Ian rested both palms against the wood. Dugall placed a hand on each of his chief's shoulders and, one behind the other, the Scots lined up in a long column, each man's hands upon the shoulders of the man in front. Then, rhythmically, in time to Ian's chanted orders, they thrust their full weight forward, drew back and thrust again. At the seventh push, there came a rending crash and the door flew open.

Ian was hurled against a massive table at the other end of which, in the midst of parchments and rolls of manuscript, sat King Roger of Sicily. Recovering his balance, the Scot looked into the eyes of the angriest man he had ever seen. In that gaze he read the knowledge that this man he had braved so recklessly was no mere scholar. Though the room behind him was filled with his clansmen, though he was armed and the king alone was weaponless, Ian felt for the first time something close to panic, but he recovered quickly and returned stare for stare.

Roger rose. As tall as the Scot, the king seemed to tower above him and dominate the room.

"Welcome again, O Prince of Moray. I have longed to see your face without the reverend beard of your disguise. Have you come to be paid the price on your own head? Tell me, how did you pass my guards?"

Ian pointed to the hilts that projected above the shoulders of his men.

"Our swords opened the way," he answered.

"You dare come before me with the blood of my servants on your blades? Do you think that I will let you go after that? There is a vault below the palace where engines of torture, such as your barbaric mind can not conceive, await you."

Their swords and his own helplessness concerned Roger not at all. He was king; they were under his displeasure. His fearlessness compelled Ian's admiration, but this was no time for talking. He took from his pouch a roll of parchment which Khaled had given him on the road and laid it before the king.

"Read this!" he ordered bluntly. Roger frowned and did not touch the manuscript. Ian's eyes roved from the king to the walls of the room, noted the open skylight above, the single window curtained with black velvet, then he spoke again.

"You have sat here idle many days while your kingdom totters beneath you. Your city rings with the cries of rebellion outside the silence of this secret place. Men say that you are a sleeping lion. Awake now, or you will sleep forever!"

"What mean you?" asked Roger.

"That Achmed al-Mokhtar, your friend and teacher, whom you have not seen for more than a week, is Abd el-Mumin, the Mahdi!"

"Do you expect me to believe the word of one whose first act in my kingdom was to deceive me?"

Ian's temper broke. He laid his hand upon the king's shoulder and shook him savagely. At this unheard-of daring, Roger gasped, but he was too much the monarch to lose his dignity. He neither struggled nor protested.

"The Almohades are upon you!" Ian cried. "A fleet greater than that with

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which your admiral knocks at the gates of Constantinople is approaching your shores! Your city crawls with spies and secret assassins; there is riot and revolution below your very walls; the knife is at your throat. If you value your kingdom, your life, the lives of your people, stir yourself!"

"Remove your hand!" Roger answered quietly. Ian did so. It seemed as if a force greater than his own compelled him to relax his grip. The king picked up and read the parchment. It was the signed confession of Christodoulos, witnessed by Khaled.

"How do I know that this is not a forgery?"

Striding to the window, Ian tore down the black velvet curtain, threw open sash and shutters and pointed out. From the *kemonia* and the *khalsa* beyond, rose fierce shouting, the crash of hammers, the clang of steel. Through the dust-veil of the sirocco came the flash of brandished blades in the swarming streets and the reek of burning houses. Louder and louder rose the roar of angry men thirsting for slaughter.

Roger saw and heard. Abruptly he clasped Ian's hand.

"Take your men down into the *kemonia* at once," he commanded. "Cross into the *khalsa* and put an end to this folly."

Before Ian could answer, the king strode from the room.

"The lion has waked," said Dugall. "I am glad my head is no longer between his jaws."

CHAPTER XVII

LONG LIVE THE KING!

WHEN Ian led his little force from the palace, on the south side, just east of the *galga* wall, he was impressed with Roger's disbelief in the impossible. A few steps took him to the *kemonia* bridge, held by two thousand of the palace guard under Khaled. Before them, across the river, the Street of the Corinthians was packed with a turbaned mob that brandished spears and simitars, screamed curses and called down the wrath of Allah on the murdering unbelievers. The very house-tops swarmed.

Khaled stood on the coping, scanning the mob. As the Scots came up, he sprang down and warmly grasped Ian's hand.

"You have succeeded!" he cried. "I will wager he commanded you to advance to the *khalsa*."

"How did you know that?"

"I know Roger. If he pardoned you, it would be because your courage convinced him that you are the man to send where the danger is thickest. You must not expose yourself here; there is hotter work waiting for you in the Moslem quarter."

"There are Moslems enough here," Ian observed. "Can there be any more in Palermo?"

"Thrice as many. This is the Greek quarter; the Moslems have come here partly to command this bridge leading to the castle, and partly to loot. Those folk on the house-tops are the Greeks."

Ian mounted the bridge-coping. At the sight of him, the Moslems in the street and along the river-bank burst into yells of rage. But the men and women on the house-tops, clad in the fashion of Byzantium, spat and cursed at the Saracens below who were howling:

"Kill! Kill! Slay him who poisoned our king!"

Hitherto the crowd had contented itself with hooting and cursing the guard drawn up on the bridge. Now stones flew, striking down two of the guardsmen. Instantly Khaled bade his trumpeter sound the charge.

Shoulder to shoulder, rank after rank, the guard swept forward with raised shields and lowered pikes. They did not use their light stabbing-spears as the Norman horsemen used the lance; they held the long shaft well back in one hand, and thrust with the point, striking deep and freeing the point swiftly with a dexterous twist of the wrist. Skilfully parrying the simitar blows with the round shields on their left forearms, the palace guard drove deep into the mob.

Those in front pressed back in terror, but the dense mass behind pushed forward till the guard were brought to a stand. Behind them the Scots fumed vainly, unable to strike a blow.

Above, on the house-tops, the Greeks leaned over to see the battle. A weather-worn parapet gave way under the weight behind it and three or four heavy stones broke loose and plunged down into the seething center of the mob. Loud shrieks rose from the stricken Moslems, echoed by shouts of glee from the Greeks. Crowbars were brought and plied with vengeful zeal.

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Stones crashed into the helpless Moors from both sides of the street and down its entire length. The sudden destruction from above was more terrible to the mob than all the spears of Khaled; they wavered, turned and trampled on one another in frantic struggles to get away.

Ten of the guardsmen were killed or wounded; more than a hundred Moors, battered and trampled, lay in the street. From under a pile of dead one crawled and knelt in supplication to Khaled. As the captain bade him rise, the other whispered:

"We mingled with them, as you bade us, and four of us were killed by the falling stones. I have a list of those who urged the people to violence."

"Good!" Khaled commended him. "Now haste to the *khalsa*!"

The Moslems along the river-bank still held their ground, though the fate of their more numerous comrades in the Street of the Corinthians had daunted and shaken them. The long column of the guard was now clear of the bridge. Eagerly crowding after, the Highlanders faced to the left along the river-bank and charged.

Trained to chase the red deer of the Highlands on foot, the Scots left the spearmen far behind. The Moslem rebels, already shaken, could not endure the sight of those mighty blades sweeping on like sleet borne by a hurricane. Faster than charging horsemen the Highlanders bore down upon them. Before the broadswords had been wet twice, the Moors fled with shrieks of terror. They disappeared from the *kemonia* as leaves before the Winter wind, their white robes fluttering far down toward the Moslem quarter.

In sheer pity, Khaled called back the Scots.

"They are my people!" he cried to Ian. "Save your strength for the Berbers!"

The guard and the Highlanders advanced together along the bank. On their left flowed the river and beyond it rose the wall of the *kasr*, or inner city. On their right, some distance before them, lay the Moslem quarter. With every step they took toward it, louder rose the roar of the mob and the fierce chanting of the mollahs.

"The Mahdi is hard at work there," Khaled muttered. "The red flower of death will bloom in the quarter today!"

At a deserted cross-street, he halted the column and turned to Ian.

"My agents report," said Khaled, "that the rebels are massed in the Moslem market, behind strong barricades. They expect that we will shatter our slender forces against their ramparts, after which they will counter-attack, sweeping all before them. Yet they have prepared for their own retreat, if we prevail, by leaving open one street leading to the Mahdi's headquarters in the *khalsa*."

"The old fort overlooking the harbor?" asked Ian.

"Yes. It was easy for him to seize it, for it is never garrisoned now except in time of siege."

"Knowing this, you have planned to turn their position?"

"Even so, my brother. Do you, with your Scots and eight hundred of the guard march down this empty street here till you come to the Avenue of the Balharah. Halt there; do not enter the avenue, for that is the open way I spoke of to the rear of the rebel position in the market. I shall also send you Ibn Abdallah's company of archers.

"I myself, with the rest of the guard, will march on down the river-bank to the Bridge of the Ethiopians, opposite the Mahdi's main barricade at the foot of the Avenue of the Balharah. There I shall try to induce the loyal but misguided Moslems among the mob to disperse peacefully. If I succeed, molest them not as they go.

"If all or any stand defiant, then my trumpet will sound the onset. When you hear it, charge down the avenue and take them in the rear. May Allah protect you, my brother. Forward, the palace guard!"

The two bodies of infantry marched off to their respective positions. Ian led his own contingent far down the empty, twisting side street till they came to its intersection with the broad, deserted Avenue of the Balharah. There they stood and waited, while from no great distance rose and fell the ominous murmur of a mighty multitude.

Presently Ibn Abdallah, Captain of the King's Archers, came up behind them at the head of his two hundred swaggering bowmen. He knocked seven times with his dagger-hilt on the door of the corner house on the side of the street toward the market. The door opened, and in pressed a hundred of the archers. The other half of the company crawled on their hands and knees in single file across the Avenue of the Balharah.

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"How can they escape being seen by the rebels in the market?" Ian asked Ibn Abdallah, a bearded Saracen with a fine face and soldierly bearing.

"A slight rise in the ground between, seignior," answered the captain, smiling. As the first of the line of crawling men reached a door on the other side of the avenue, it swung silently inward to admit him and his fellows.

"How did you know those doors would be opened to you?" asked Ian as Ibn Abdallah turned to follow his men.

"My lord Khaled knew," answered the other significantly. "When the seignior's men advance, my arrows will cover them from the house-tops."

For nearly an hour longer, Ian's forces waited for Khaled's trumpet-call. Then, suddenly, from the direction of the market came a shout so loud and fearsome as to make the boldest guardsman pale beneath his dark skin, while Dugall Mor commended himself hastily to the saints.

AT THE foot of the Avenue of the Balharah, Khaled and his twelve hundred stood face to face with death. Behind them was the empty Bridge of the Ethiopians; before them, the avenue was closed with a massive barricade of timbers, paving-stones and bales of looted fabrics. Lining the barricade or packed tight behind it far down the avenue and in the open market-place stood not less than twenty thousand armed and angry Moslems. The roar of their voices, the flash of brandished simitars above the heaving mass of white turbans was like the surge and crash of breakers to the crew of a doomed ship.

As soon as the tumult paused, Khaled spoke.

"Throw down your arms!" he cried. "Yield to the king's mercy!"

Hoots and jeers were his answer. When the mob had shouted its fill, a huge Moor mounted the barricade and made reply:

"How can we yield to the king when the Christians have murdered him? It is to take vengeance for his death that we are here. Give up to us Hugo the Hammer, the woman of Rocca Forte and the Scots who plotted the crime! Then, and not before, will we lay down our arms!"

"The king lives!" shouted Khaled.

The mob howled its disbelief.

"You lie, renegade!" retorted their spokesman. "We know he is dead, for the holy mollahs have told us!"

"Will ye disperse peacefully if I prove to you that he lives and that the mollahs have betrayed you?"

For a moment the mob was silent. Then a great disputation arose among them. Listening, Khaled realized that the greater part of the rebels were eager to believe the king was alive and that those who protested were a violent minority. He set these down as Almohades and their number at three or four thousand. With dismay he realized that most of the Berber fanatics had been smuggled into the capital and that he had underrated the Mahdi.

"On, brothers!" shouted a mollah. "Follow us to the palace and we will show you the king's dead body!"

The crowd surged forward, caught with the idea. Khaled shouted vainly, his heart heavy with the knowledge that neither his words nor his handful of guardsmen could stop them now. Once in the palace, the Almohades leading them would soon provide a dead king.

On the city wall, above the gate that opened on the Bridge of the Ethiopians, was a stone balcony. As the throng surged forward, a door opened upon the balcony, and a man stepped out. Clad in his gold-embroidered robes of state, crowned with the diadem of the Two Sicilies, King Roger stood before his people.

There was a moment of silence and then pealed out such a cry of joy as Palermo had never before heard. It beat upon the walls of the *kasr* and reechoed down the long streets; it swelled and pulsed ecstatically. Behind the barrier, four-fifths of the rebel host leaped and cheered and danced their happiness. The king they loved, whom they had thought dead, had come back to them as from the grave.

Roger raised one hand; the tumult died away.

"My people," he addressed them in resonant tones that carried to the last man of the multitude, "ye have been led astray by traitors in your midst. The Scottish prince and his warriors, whom ye would have slain, are my guests, my friends. Nay more, he, and he alone, saved me and you from the heretical Almohades whose agents are among you even now. But for him those bloodthirsty dogs would have used

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you to conquer your own city for themselves, and then made you their wretched slaves.

"Ye have broken the peace of my realm, but I forgive you. Go now to your homes and fear nothing. I have taken the peril of this city into my own hands. Go quickly, each man to his own!"

The Moor who had bandied words with Khaled, still standing on the barricade, threw himself to his knees.

"O King of the Age," he begged, "point out to us these Almohades, that we may slay them!"

Roger smiled.

"It is not your fight," he answered. "Though I have but a handful of troops in the city, I will visit God's wrath upon them."

Bitter as developments had been for the Almohades, they neither spoke nor moved. Well they knew that if they strove to turn the people against their beloved ruler, they would be torn in pieces. Roger himself had said his troops to be few and they themselves knew it to be the truth. Let the people go and, once they were out of sight, the fanatics would brush aside the guardsmen, storm the gate and hurl Roger from the balcony.

The loyal Moslems obediently dispersed down the Avenue of the Balharah and thence to their homes. Swiftly the sheep were separated from the goats. Not less than four thousand Berbers gathered behind the barricade and made ready to charge.

As the first fanatic leaped down from the barricade, Khaled's trumpeter sounded the onset. A storm of arrows burst upon the startled Berbers from behind. Ibn Abdallah's archers had crept up along the roofs on either side of the avenue. Unable to return or evade the deadly shafts, the Almohades pressed forward over their own dead. Once the Berbers could come to close grips with the guard, the archers could not loose without shooting their own allies.

But the guard, dividing into two detachments, wheeled to right and left, leaving a clear path to the Bridge of the Ethiopians. And now, to speed the Almohades on their way, came charging down the Avenue of the Balharah, Ian and his fiery clansmen with eight hundred of the guard behind them.

The rearmost Berbers faced about to meet them, only to be riddled by arrows from the house-tops, hewn to pieces by the mighty broadswords and thrust through by the guardsmen's spears. The fanatics were swept on over the barricade.

But one way lay open to the Almohades—straight forward across the bridge. They still outnumbered their assailants and, though they had been for a moment caught in a trap, they felt out of it now. Once over the bridge, they could burst the old, half-rotten gates and swarm up the gate-house stairs to where Roger of Sicily still stood alone.

Across the Bridge of the Ethiopians poured the fanatics, shaking their spears and shrieking their rage at the Christian king who looked calmly and contemptuously down upon them. They were half-way across when the gates were flung wide open. Out from the yawning portal burst an avalanche of mounted men-at-arms. Boot to boot, their lowered lance-points projecting twelve feet beyond the horses' heads, they crashed into the astounded Almohades.

Backed by the weight and speed of five hundred horse, the long lances each pierced from two to four men through and through ere they were cast aside. Then, swords out, the riders of Hugo the Hammer justified their leader's name. Hurled back from the bridge, the Berbers were charged on both flanks by Khaled's guardsmen and driven from the barricade by the Highland broadswords. Penned in on all sides, the Almohades died like trapped wolves beneath the peasants' clubs.

But the clansmen were too few to hold the whole front of the barricade. The lowest and weakest point chanced to be defended by the youngest recruits of the palace guard. Driven by a fresh surge of the Norman riders, the last few hundred of the Berbers broke through and fled up the Avenue of the Balharah.

Eagerly the fleet-footed Scots pursued, but they were too few to do more than cut down stragglers. Precious time was spent in tearing a passage through the barricade for the horsemen. When at last Hugo's squadron came thundering up the avenue to the gates of the *khalsa*, they found them closed and barred.

There, calmly standing guard over the hundreds of fanatics who had taken refuge within the fortress, Hugo found Ian and eighteen Highlanders. Of the rest who had marched with him from Rocca Forte, ten were wounded and twelve dead.

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"Let me relieve you, savior of the realm," said Hugo, grinning hugely. "The king would speak with you."

CHAPTER XVIII

BLACK SAILS

IAN found the king in the council chamber. The walls of the room glowed with flowered mosaics of semi-precious stones on a background of creamy marble. The one tall window was framed in marble fret-work, delicate as lace, and overhung without by trailing roses from some hanging garden above. In the open space between double rows of Corinthian columns, subtly changed by Moorish artistry, the king and four others sat on cushioned onyx benches on three sides of a cross-shaped marble fountain of clear water in which swam marvelously colored fish.

But Ian's first glance passed beyond the fountain and those about it, through the glorious window and over the city. He could see the whole length of the marble way with its stately cathedrals, mosques, palaces and temples, the *kasr* hill with its mighty wall, the white outer city, even the two turquoise arms of the Mediterranean which embraced Palermo, the jewel of the south.

The king's voice roused Ian from his absorption.

"I have summoned you," he said, "to a secret consultation on the welfare of the realm. So long as you remain in Sicily, you shall sit, as you have earned the right to, in my privy council. Those who are here you already know."

The others about the fountain were Ali Hassan, the lean old Chief Counselor; Khaled and two Norman barons. Bowing to them and thanking Roger for his courtesy, Ian asked how he might be of service.

"That will depend," the king answered, "on what you and Khaled can tell me of this conspiracy. Khaled, will you, as Vizier of the Divan of Secret Police, give me what information you have?"

Khaled obeyed, giving a full report of all that he had learned since first he had begun to frequent the Garden of Heart's Delight, omitting nothing save the part played by Gulnar. Ian followed with a detailed account of his own adventures, from his collision with the fanatics in Portugal down to the expected coming of the Berber fleet.

"You have saved the kingdom between you," said the king. "But you tell me the Mahdi boasted five thousand Berber spearmen scattered throughout Sicily, whereas he had not less than four thousand of them behind the barricade today. No, Khaled, even though he thought he spoke to one about to die that night in the Valley of the Moon, he concealed the full number of his forces here. If he deceived you once, he may have done so many times. The Berber fleet may arrive sooner than he pretended. We must prepare not only against the dangers we know of, but against greater dangers yet hidden from us."

The counselors bowed assent to the king's wisdom.

"It will take a fortnight to assemble the feudal army," said Ali Hassan. "Has the call gone out?"

Roger smiled.

"As soon as the Seignior Ian left my study this morning, the summons was sent out by swift runners to every baron and caid in Sicily."

"The host will gather here?" Khaled asked.

"No, at Corleone, that we may reach Rocca Forte the sooner. Speaking of Corleone, Khaled, it evaded your wisdom that the orders which sent Hugo to Cefalu were not from me. They were skilfully forged. I told you the Mahdi was a man of deeper cunning than you suspected. I never met a more learned man. It is the shame of the age that such a scholar should be wasted to make the leader of a *jehad*."

Ian had been pondering the king's words and now he spoke:

"O King of the Age, scarce seven days remain at best before the Berber fleet is due, and, if the Mahdi lied, his ships may even now be off Rocca Forte. I pray you, therefore, let me depart at once to add what little strength I have to the defense. If Rocca Forte falls, Sicily falls."

"You shall go, but not now," Roger replied. "You and your men must rest and sleep till nightfall. That is all, seigniors. I have something to say to the Prince of Moray in private."

When the others had left, Roger sat down opposite Ian where he could look into his eyes.

"Seignior Scot," he said, "you are a man such as I have needed sorely. Until a year

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ago there were many in Sicily who respected me little and obeyed me less. I crushed and tamed them till I have turned a land of riot and pillage into one of law and peace.

"But I have gone too far; my subjects lean on me. There is not one, save Khaled ben-Zobair, upon whom I can lean, and even he has his limits. But you, in order to save me and my kingdom, have dared to disobey me, to flout me, to lay hands upon me. Such spirit as yours must be used for Sicily's good."

"It is the spirit of my people," said the Highlander.

"A dangerous spirit for Sicily, if there were too much of it," Roger commented, "but healthful in small quantities. Consider the Lady Fulvia. A year ago, before I tamed my barons, she was a mere girl in a land thick with thieves, outlaws and petty tyrants. Her beauty and her fief made her a natural prey, but she defended herself so well that the fiercest warriors in Sicily were glad to keep away from her. Once she even defied my command and, taking up arms against the man I had authorized to marry her, captured him and all his host."

Ian smiled.

"So Hugo the Hammer told me."

"You know what sort of man he is—valiant, cunning and terrible. The woman who could outwit him should have made an ideal guardian for the richest and most vital fief in my realm, but she failed."

"Failed?"

"She let Christodoulos take Rocca Forte from her."

"But that was your failure, not hers!" Ian protested. "It was you who were deceived by Christodoulos. She knew him for an evil man, though not for a traitor, and surrendered her castle because it was your command."

"Exactly. And there I come to the point. If she had not been tamed with the rest of my barons, if she had shown a spark of the old spirit with which she defied me a year ago, she would have thrown the king's writ in his face and sent him packing back to Palermo. That is what you would have done, is it not?"

"It is, and you would have hanged me for it," Ian answered.

"True, at that time. Not now, if you should defy me again. You were insolent enough this morning, yet you share my counsels and receive not death, but honors. I do not forgive useless disobedience, but honor the rare kind which proceeds from wisdom and loyalty.

"You are the only man in my realm who dares disobey me for my own good, and such a man is necessary to me. Only such a man can successfully govern Rocca Forte. I can no longer let the Countess Fulvia remain mistress there. In the past I have tried to find her a husband, but she was too strong, too shrewd for any of my barons, but you are stronger than she.

"I have dreams of empire, Seignior Ian, that will bring wars to this land. Through the years to come Rocco Forte must be held or Sicily will perish. I must have the strongest man I can find to be its master, and you are he. Therefore I offer you the hand of Fulvia and with her Rocca Forte and Castrocavalli, to have and to hold in my name."

Ian stared dumbly at the king. He had but to say the word and the very monarch he had so unpardonably offended less than seven hours before would command Fulvia to marry him! Fulvia, dearer to him than life, would be his. Yet there was his oath to Gulnar. His honor bound him to that. Nor was it honorable, even if there were no other bar, to take a woman who would be his only because she must. He shook his head.

"I can not take advantage of your Majesty's kindness," he answered.

Roger sighed ruefully.

"You were just the man to hold that castle and to make Fulvia happy. She will never be content with a husband she can outwit, outfight or dominate. Well, I will not try to persuade you, for you are a man who knows his own mind. Go back to Rocca Forte, hold out till I come and then do what pleases you. I wonder what that will be?"

"I know not," Ian answered thoughtfully. "I can not well go back to Scotland, for, though King David has pardoned me, he is a usurper whom I will not serve. I no longer have a country or a home."

"Pray God you settle down in Sicily, then!" the King exclaimed devoutly, "whether you marry Fulvia or some other woman. At nightfall Khaled will see you out of the city. Your wounded shall receive the care of my own physician. Farewell!"

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THAT night, as the Scots rode eastward, the sirocco ended and the rains returned. This time there were no fresh mounts for them at Corleone. Through the mud and downpour, it was sunset of the second day when they reached the Pass of Blood.

Twenty Norman men-at-arms garrisoned the small fort there—too few to hold the pass should the Berbers take Rocca Forte. Ian showed the signed and sealed order of the king for him to take over the defense of the castle and commanded the Normans to follow him.

Twenty-four hours later Ian, with eight and thirty men behind him, rode up to the barbican at the foot of the ramp leading up to Rocca Forte. The rain had ceased and the day was bright with the clearness that comes only between the rains. Showing his writ and displaying the king's banner, Ian was passed in without delay.

As he rode round the last angle of the ramp, there came a loud hail from the battlements of the keep. It was not for Ian; its tone was defiance mingled with fear. It was taken up at once from the bailey and reechoed from the barbican below. The words filled Ian's heart with fire:

"To arms! The Berber fleet!"

Rising in his saddle, Ian looked over the wall of the ramp and down from the dizzy crag over the sea beyond. A scant league away, outlined with the strange clearness of the day's last hour, a multitude of black specks stood out against the sunset.

Black sails! A flotilla bearing the color of death!

Ian drove his weary horse in through the castle gate, followed by the clansmen and the men from the pass, and dismounted in the bailey. Striding over the inner drawbridge, he entered the hall.

The light within was dim and, for a moment, he could not see, but in that moment he heard a glad cry; soft hands grasped his, and Fulvia of Rocca Forte welcomed him home.

CHAPTER XIX

HERACLIDES COMES INTO HIS OWN

BOTH realized that there was no time to be wasted in greetings or explanations. As soon as the first words were said, Ian drew out his writ from the king and showed it to Fulvia and Jaufré. Great were their joy and astonishment to see the former outlaw return, high in the royal favor, to take command of the castle. They knew him and the king's seal—the rest could wait till the fighting was done.

Jaufré had already posted the Scots, Normans and the three hundred armed peasants left in the castle, made ready the catapults and stones, melted lead and done everything in preparation for an orthodox siege, but Ian's intentions were far from orthodox.

First he detached Gui, with thirty men-at-arms, from the force holding the bailey and sent him to the Moslem fishing-village across the harbor. His orders were to hold the landing-place—the one spot on that side of the shore where the cliff facing Rocca Forte crag did not forbid access to the sea—till he was ordered to retreat.

"Lower the chain across the harbor-mouth," Ian next commanded.

"That is madness!" protested Jaufré.

"To disobey," said Fulvia quietly, "is treason."

The girl, in spite of the apparent folly of Ian's actions, felt somehow an entire confidence in him, though her eyes were bright with nervous excitement.

The hostile ships were now near enough to count, had it been daylight. As it was, by the light of the torches on their decks, Jaufré estimated them at over two hundred, all very large. That meant between thirty and forty thousand men. He had not expected a fourth of that number.

Mounting to the keep, Jaufré found Ian busy directing a score of men in some strange task which they were performing under the eye of Heraclides. The little Byzantine was fairly swelling with self-importance. The torchlight glittered on strange tubes of bronze-cased wood which were being set up and pointed over the battlements of the tower. Each tube had a wide bulge or chamber near its base which then tapered off to the same diameter as that of the outer end. There were odd pump-like attachments to the bulges, and these pumps were connected with vats of evil-smelling stuff on the stone roof of the tower.

"Well done!" Heraclides pronounced at last. "Now the hose!"

Already several men were passing lengths

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of leather hose from the base of a strange-looking structure erected on the landward side of the keep.

"Will it flow?" Ian asked.

"Perfectly," answered the Greek. "The old tank was not high enough, so I had that new water-tower built while you were in Palermo and led the supply from the tank into it by means of an improvement on the screw of Archimedes. The pressure will be very great until the supply in the tower becomes too low. Bring up the swivels, fellows! Think not to hold those siphons in your hands. Death would follow such an act of folly."

Jaufré could endure no more.

"Death will follow indeed!" he exclaimed. "Do you think to drive the Berbers away with streams of water, Seignior Ian, or will you frighten them with the stinking liquid in these vats? I have borne with this Greek's folly long enough. I helped him with his miserable tubes and pipes for three days and toiled with my own hands to erect that rampart he ordered built at the landing-place opposite. I did this because you, Seignior Scot, bade us obey him while you were gone, but if I had thought you would send poor Gui to die behind a little wall of stones and earth while you skulked in the castle, I would have thrown Heraclides from the battlements and shut the gate in your face!"

"When the battle is joined," Ian answered calmly, "I will let you hold the castle while I face the Berber simitars below. Now go to your post and do not interfere with that which you do not understand."

Jaufré withdrew sullenly. As he left the tower-top, two guards brought up the trembling figure of Christodoulos. Pressing his dagger against the traitor's side, Ian commanded—

"Give the signal!"

The point pricking his flesh, the renegade dared not hesitate. Taking a torch from its bracket, he waved it slowly above his head five times. The signal was instantly returned from the sea where the Berber fleet crept slowly in toward the now lowered chain. Taking the torch from him, Ian marched Christodoulos down into the great hall.

There they found fifty Arabs from the fishing-village, clad in black robes stripped from the slain Berbers who had once held the castle. Though he had himself sent for them, Ian started, so strikingly did they resemble the fanatics. Most of them wore mail under their robes, and all bore weapons. Ian now put on similar robes and, concealing his face in the attached hood, became to all seeming an Almohade. Keeping close watch on Christodoulos, Ian led his disguised followers down to the castle quay.

The shore of the harbor was an elongated semicircle bitten into the coast, dominated on one side by the unscalable castle crag, on the other by a similarly steep but lower headland. The edge of the bowl was rimmed by precipitous slopes, except at the two landing-stages. The one at the Moslem fishing-village was covered by an earthwork, manned by Gui and his thirty spears. The masonry slope leading down to the castle quay had been barricaded. In front of each landing, a mass of dried logs and timbers floated in the water. All this was hidden by the darkness of a clouded night.

From his post on the battlements of the bailey, Jaufré watched the torches of Ian's masqueraders descend through the night till they halted at the gate in the barricade on the quay; then he began to curse savagely, for he saw the foremost Berber ships, their torch-lit decks swarming with armed men, draw into the harbor. Silently, save for the throbbing of the drums that gave the stroke to the galley-slaves, the fleet pulled in in double column. Jaufré could hardly contain his rage. This was either treason or suicide. Vainly he wished that he had stabbed the mad Scot and put Heraclides in irons. It was too late now. The Berber vessels were already dropping their anchors in the harbor.

A single galley drew in alongside the castle quay. By the light of her cressets, Jaufré saw a landing-party pick their way over the raft to the landing-place where black-clad figures stood to receive them. Dimly the Norman captain began to understand, though much was yet hidden from him.

Under threat of torture, Christodoulos had told that the Berbers planned to arrive at sunset; that he was to give a signal indicating that all was safe; and that the Almohade admiral and his staff would then disembark and take possession of the castle. The fleet was to anchor in the harbor all night and the disembarkation was to begin at dawn, when the men could be landed without risk or disorder.

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The foremost of the landing-party from the flagship hesitated at the gate in the barricade.

"Is all well, Christodoulos?" he called suspicously.

The Greek, taking his cue from the point of Ian's knife, answered:

"All is well, Lord Admiral. The castle is in our hands."

"Then why this barricade? And what is this mass of wood doing before the quay?"

The renegade answered glibly with the lie which Ian had bidden him tell:

"We had word from Palermo, O Noble One, that George of Antioch is returning from the east. Therefore I ordered these steps taken to prevent his landing here."

"George of Antioch is still at Corfu," the admiral answered. "Nevertheless, no precaution comes amiss. Lead on!"

They escorted him and his staff toward the castle till they reached the barbican. At the gate Ian shouted—

"Open!"

The gate was thrown wide and instantly Ian and his Moslem fishermen flung themselves upon the Almohade officers. Swiftly the startled Berbers were overpowered, tied up in their own long robes and borne inside before they could do more than shout. The castle crag lay between them and their crews, who could no more hear them than they could hear the squeak of a bat. Christodoulos was seized and bound with the rest.

Ian ordered the prisoners to the dungeon and sent the fishermen to their village to reenforce Gui's company at the landing. Raoul, with a dozen Normans and two hundred peasants, marched silently and without torches to wait in the dark near the barricade at the castle quay. The castle was now held by but fifty Normans and sixty Scots.

CLIMBING to the top of the keep, Ian found Heraclides beside the three new catapult she had installed there. They were of his own design, combining the merits of both the ancient and the medieval siege-engines. Instead of cumbersome counterweights, the propulsive power came from cables of twisted sinew, stretched almost to the breaking-point when the long wooden beam of the catapult was drawn back by windlasses. At the end of the beam, instead of the old-fashioned spoon, a long sling of rope and leather rested on the tower roof ready to receive a stone or other missile. The flagging about each catapult was piled with earthenware pots of a curious design.

Heraclides was almost dancing with excitement.

"See!" he cried. "The entire fleet is in the harbor and the chain raised behind them. Their hulls nearly touch one another from shore to shore."

"Is all in readiness?" Ian asked him.

"All. Every siphon is pointed straight at its mark. See how these three control the mouth of the harbor, and these others command the basin? Their range is not great enough to reach the far side, but a few of these—" he pointed to the earthen pots at his feet—"will do as well."

"What are they?"

"Watch!"

Heraclides lifted one gingerly and placed it in the sling of the nearest catapult. The men about him loaded the other engines; at a nod from Ian and a word from the Byzantine, they struck the iron triggers with heavy mauls. At the same time other soldiers sprang to the siphons, pumped a few moments and released a spring at the point where the base of each joined its length of hose.

The earthen missiles from the catapults disappeared into the night with a strange whirring sound. Then, from far off among the Berber ships near the opposite shore, came a sudden explosion, a flash of light and a tremendous burst of flame. Before Ian could follow what was happening, there erupted from each of the siphons a vast spurt of fire, long as the trail of a rocket and bright as a meteor. It described an arc like a huge jet of luminous water and, roaring and crackling as it fell, descended upon the doomed ships.

"Those earthern pots are fire-bombs," Heraclides explained gleefully. "Loaded with this stuff in the vats, they burst on striking and flame spreads over everything the mixture touches. If they strike the water, so much the worse, for water makes the chemicals burn more fiercely. Nothing will put it out; it burns till there is nothing left to consume."

That it did so was evident from the sights and sounds that rose from the harbor. Wherever the diabolical mixture struck, flames shot up with frightful fury. Ship

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after ship became an inferno, fire spouting from the oar-ports and running up the rigging. Blazing sails dropped in fragments; masts and yards stood out black against the glow beyond. Faces distorted with pain were outlined in the fire that consumed them. The very water flamed; men dived from burning ships into a burning sea. From shore to shore the Berber fleet blazed in a conflagration from which rose the shrieks of thousands in deadly agony.

Heraclides stood on tiptoe and whispered in Ian's ear:

"To none save you, my benefactor, shall this secret ever be known. I alone possess it; it shall perish with me. Swear but to keep it hidden, and I will reveal it to you."

Horror-stricken, Ian swore. Not for anything would he reveal a mystery which held such hellish power as this. The sooner it died, the better for the world.

"Sulfur, naphtha and quicklime," the Greek whispered. "But the ingredients must be pure. It was for this I experimented by night and day in my laboratory. Once Christodoulos found me there and discovered my secret. Thinking to find some of the compound ready-mixed and analyze it, he searched my room, but I had hidden it in a recess beneath the stair.

"These lengths of hose bring water at high pressure into the chambers of these copper-lined siphons, where the mixture is forced by the pumps. Quicklime is ignited by water, and the brew issues blazing from the nozzles. When it strikes, it burns with insatiable fury. Falling upon the sea, it is quickened by the water and blazes the higher.

"These fire-bombs contain two chambers with a thin sheet of clay between. When they strike, the clay is broken and the compound in one chamber mixes with the water in the other. If they fall between two ships, the stopper of unbaked clay is melted by the sea-water, and fire results. Ah, see how beautifully it burns!"

It burned indeed. Under that infernal rain of liquid flame, beneath the fire-bombs and the streams from a dozen spouting siphons, the Berber fleet was blazing to the heavens. The whole coast was alight with the glow; the heat scorched the faces of the watchers on the walls. The mouth of the harbor was now a solid wall of fire which the current and a gentle on-shore wind carried among and around the doomed ships. The flames towered as high as the keep; the cries of agonized men rose to heaven; then ceased, as the fire overwhelmed them.

Half-mad with pain and fear, the Berbers strove to beach their ships and land. Choking in the acrid fumes, engulfed by the raging flame, they crashed into one another till several score galleys, pierced by each other's rams, settled blazing to the bottom. Here and there one or two won free and grounded. Vainly their crews leaped up at the overhanging cliffs, to fall back or cling till searing fingers of flame reached up from the water and plucked them down.

Ian watched the blazing ships struggling to reach the two landing-places, colliding and smashing together, recoiling back into the undying conflagration.

"*Pyr Thalassein* — Fire of the Sea!" Heraclides murmured happily. "Is it not beautiful?"

Ian shuddered.

"It is the fire of hell!"

As he spoke, a single galley reached the quay; a moment later another grounded on the sand at the foot of the landing-place on the opposite side. Quickly Heraclides sprang to a siphon and trained it upon the nearer ship. The arc of flame descended upon the poop; the ship flared up like straw, but fully two hundred of her crew poured over the bows, scrambled over the raft of floating timber and scrambled up on the stone quay. Behind their heels, the jet from the siphon drenched and ignited the dry timbers; before them flashed the steel of Raoul and his three hundred lining the barricade. That one crew was the last which would land at the castle-quay.

But opposite, where the second galley had been run ashore near the fishing-village, matters had taken a worse turn. The siphons could not reach so far and the fire-bombs from the catapults came too slowly to prevent one ship after another from pulling to the stranded craft and pouring their crews over her stern. Six hundred men must have landed before a well-aimed bomb burst into flame in the galley's waist and cut off those astern with a roaring wall of flame.

As soon as the second crew of Berbers had made their landing, Ian dashed down the tower stair. A few moments later, at the head of his eight and fifty clansmen, he was racing down the ramp. Gathering the garrison of the barbican, he led them in a

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dash along the shore toward the fishing-village. It was far and the handful of Normans under Gui might not hold out against the raging host that was even now storming their rampart.

As the Highlanders rounded the bay and raced toward it, they saw, against the flames, a struggle like that of the fiends of Lucifer storming heaven.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAHDI REAPPEARS

THE rampart held by Gui's Normans completely enclosed the top of the graded slope leading up from the landing-place—an artificial cove cut in the high, steep shore. The cove, deep enough for light-draft *dhows*, was filled with half-burned corpses and living men waist-deep in the salt water. Hundreds of Berbers pressed up the slope to the rampart and the ditch before it, or hurled themselves against the steep banks.

Crazed with fear of the flames behind them, the Almohades charged the rampart with never a thought of the Christian spears. The ditch was filled with their dead. Gui and his handful, reenforced by Arabs from the village and peasants from the quay, hurled them back again and again, but still they came on with brandished weapons.

Even as Ian arrived, the frantic mob, repulsed at the wall, surged against the high banks right and left of the slope. Their impetus carried those in the rear up over the shoulders of the foremost, till several score scrambled up over each bank.

Dividing his men into two detachments, Ian ordered each to hold one of the banks. The Highlanders threw themselves on the Berbers, cutting them down with the terrible broadswords, but the Almohades, having gained a foothold on the banks, held their own with bitter tenacity. Man to man, they were hopelessly outfought, but ever fresh masses clambered up and pressed forward. They fell by tens, by ranks; still they fought on till checked by a wall of their own dead backed by the Scottish blades.

Gui's Normans were hard pressed and weary. Ian ordered up all but a few of the two hundred peasants from the quay, sufficiently defended now by the blazing fire-raft and hulks that prevented further landing there. At the village landing-place, the Berbers were halted, though still unbeaten. Reduced to between four and five hundred, they were now safely out of the flaming cove and massed on the head of the two banks and before the rampart. There the men of Rocca Forte, unable to drive them into the water, held them where they were. The Almohades were powerless to advance, while the Scottish and Norman blades slew two for one. It was only a question of time.

Suddenly Ian was thrown from his feet against the rampart and the Normans about him, struck by a powerful shock from the rear, were almost swept from their position. Fierce cries rang in their ears; their backs were pierced by weapons wielded from behind.

Springing up on the rampart, Ian looked to the rear and saw, cutting through his peasant supports, at least a hundred men in black robes, headed by an enormous veiled Berber.

Instantly Ian leaped down, forced his way into the press, shouting to his men to reform against the new menace. The Normans, trained veterans, wheeled and formed back to back with locked shields.

Then, even as Ian gave up hope of resisting long, the veiled leader shouted an order to his men. Half the fresh force of Almohades left the battle. While the rest and those now swarming up from the cove held the defenders in check, the others raced down the shore to the quay. Presently, snatching a glance between strokes, Ian saw in the glow from the burning fleet that Raoul and his handful of men-at-arms were gone. The Almohades held the quay.

Under the direction of their veiled leader, they broke down the barricade and cut adrift the almost consumed fire-raft. Raising his voice, the leader shouted to those in the doomed ships:

"The way is clear! Land! The Mahdi has saved you!"

The Berber seamen needed no command. As soon as the raft had drifted clear, a burning galley crawled in like a wounded beast. Through sheets of blinding flame her crew rushed forward upon the quay. A second craft grated alongside and vomited armed men.

There was room for no more, but the ships were almost touching, and, from those on which life still remained, the scorched Berbers scurried like ants from a burning log, leaping from rail to rail till they reached the quay. As they thronged it, a storm of

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fire-bombs and stones from the castle crushed and burned them. All that saved them was the wide arc of the fiery streams from the siphons which shot the Greek fire well over their cowering heads. Urged by the shouted orders of the veiled Mahdi, the Berbers sped up the shore as fast as feet could bear them.

The genius of Heraclides and his possession of the secret of Greek fire had shattered the great fleet. Save only the four or five thousand who had gained the shore, nothing was left but charred bodies and blazing hulks, but the Mahdi had saved enough from the ruin to encircle Rocca Forte with steel and leave an army capable of marching on Palermo, for the feudal host was not yet assembled, the royal troops in the city were but a handful and Palermo still held hundreds, if not thousands, of Sicilian converts to the Mahdi.

All this flashed through Ian's mind as he and his warriors battled against the reenforced Berbers between the cove and the fishing-village. Cut off from the castle, they must withdraw in the face of furious onslaughts.

Already the light from the burning ships showed a host of Berbers charging toward him along the edge of the cliff. Then came a spurt of flame from a siphon on the keep, further than any had yet spurted. Curving through the smoke, it fell before the Berber vanguard and drove them back howling. Ian realized that his plight was seen from the castle and that Heraclides could be relied upon to help.

As soon as the Berbers had gained the shore, the Byzantine had shut off the water and remounted his swivels on the outer edge of the battlements so that the siphons pointed straight downward, with a possible outward arc of thirty degrees. Having driven back the first Berber advance toward Ian's forces, Heraclides drew a line of flame between them and the castle.

Ian understood at once. The siphons now commanded a wide space between the shore and the castle crag. If Ian could reach that space, Heraclides would hold the Almohades outside it with a curtain of flame.

Forming his men into a compact wedge, Ian ordered the retreat. From all three sides their foes pressed in upon them, but Scot and Norman beat off their adversaries with heavy strokes, and, shoulder to shoulder with them, the peasants and fishermen fought as valiantly as the men-at-arms.

At last they came to the curtain of Greek fire. Though fearing no man, the Berbers now shrank back; the mere threat of the terrible flame within ten yards of the fanatics was enough. The curtain lifted. Breaking their formation, the Christians darted through the smoking gap. Every siphon was spouting now in a wide arc of roaring flame. Beneath this arc the Scots and Sicilians passed, while the thousands beyond the curtain yelled in vain rage. Not even the Mahdi, though he claimed to be greater than Mohammed, dared to charge that solid wall of all-consuming fire.

After they had turned the angle of the crag, the siphons could no longer aid the fugitives, but now, from the bailey walls, Jaufré's men shot darts and stones from the catapults, driving back the pursuers, so Ian and his men won through to the barbican and in the gate.

As the gate clanged shut behind them, Gui flung both arms about Ian with Latin enthusiasm.

"Ah, it was a great fight!" he cried. "You are as cunning as you are brave, Seignior Ian!"

"It is you who are brave and Heraclides who is cunning," Ian answered. "But neither cunning nor courage will save us from a siege now. Get your men to the walls!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE DOOM OF THE RENEGADE

BY THE light of the still blazing harbor, Jaufré distributed his forces as Ian bade him. The garrison had been reduced to five hundred and twenty effectives, of whom about four hundred were brave but poorly trained peasants. Of the rest, but seventy Normans and forty-seven Scots were able to bear arms, and many of them were slightly wounded. Nearly a hundred had been killed or were too severely wounded to be of any present use, and outside the walls some five thousand merciless fanatics cried on Allah for vengeance.

The Almohades attacked at once, without the usual drum-beating or clashing of cymbals characteristic of Moslem warfare. In their wild scramble ashore, they had brought nothing save their weapons.

The assault developed out of the pursuit of Ian's party. Scarce had the barbican

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gate been closed when a mass of Berbers surged up against it, but the massive, iron-studded oak gate held fast, while through slots in the stonework above and on either side, the archers within loosed arrows at the close-packed Almohades.

The fanatics separated and swept past the barbican till they swarmed up the slope below the lowest turns of the zigzag ramp that climbed the crag to the castle above. Presently the deep voice of the Mahdi boomed out. Hidden in the deep shadow of the crag, his men began to toil like ants. Swiftly they formed human pyramids, the bases of which filled all the ground on which a man might stand, and the apexes of which were hands reaching nearer and nearer to the level of the battlements.

Seeking for fire-bombs to use now against land-attacks, Ian hastened to the top of the keep. As he reached the roof of the tower he saw an amazing sight. Bound into a living bundle, Christodoulos, the traitor, lay in the sling of the largest catapult. Standing over him, pointing out the hell of flame that still rolled above the waters, Heraclides exulted and gibed. The face of the ex-admiral was fiendish with half-insane joy. He spoke in Greek, but his tones, filled with mockery and hate, made his purpose clear. From the background the men-at-arms who had served the siphons and catapults looked on with grim enjoyment.

"Stop, you devil's imp!" cried Ian, leaping forward to snatch the hapless renegade from his horrible position. "Let him go!"

"As you command, seignior!"

Snatching up a maul, Heraclides struck the trigger of the catapult. The long beam shot up and forward to the end of its arc; the trailing sling whirled over the now skyward-pointing end of the beam as if in the hand of some giant David. Christodoulos, shrieking terribly, was hurled into space. His body, whirling grotesquely through the glowing air, described a series of somersaults for perhaps five hundred feet and then dropped like a plummet into the fiery hell that raged beneath. A spout of flaming spray shot up, smothering one final scream; then the red waters closed again.

A SENTRY'S cry brought a rush of men-at-arms toward the lower angle of the ramp. Discovered, the topmost Berbers, whose heads were level with the crenelated edge, strove frantically to lift themselves over on to the parapet. Cursing thunderously, Jaufré raised one of a pile of shaped stones ready beside a catapult and hurled it over the wall full into the center of one clinging, swaying pyramid of men. A crunch, a scream, the cry of many voices and the whole structure collapsed. A few brown hands still clung to the merlons, till spear-thrusts sent their owners down upon their writhing fellows forty feet below.

More stones were rolled over. Ten-foot ladles were dipped into a great iron pot above a glowing fire, and gallons of molten lead poured over the climbing Berbers. Soon, of all the ant-like swarms that had so nearly topped the wall, there remained but writhing heaps of smashed limbs and broken bodies.

There was no second attack that night. The Mahdi's men crept away in the darkness, crying that the Christians were devils —jinnee who wielded the weapons of Eblis. All night the garrison stood watch and watch, save Ian, who constantly made the circuit of the walls, and Ibn Hawwas and Fulvia, tending the wounded. Those three slept not at all.

At dawn the shore was black with Berbers prostrating themselves, chanting aloud the prescribed Islamic prayers and going through the semblance of washing head, hands and feet. The law ordained the use of water, but the harbor was polluted and, in time of war, the Koran allows irregularities.

The prayer over, two parties were sent out to forage in the deserted towns, and another into the hills. These last brought back several score ladders fashioned in the forest, pegged and lashed with green bark. In full sight of the besieged, the Berbers joined the ladders together to a length suitable for scaling the lofty walls. Then, led by the Mahdi himself, they advanced on the only vulnerable points—the barbican and the ramp.

Eight catapults hurled huge stones that plowed long lanes through the crowded ranks, but it took time to wind the great windlasses that twisted the cords by which these stones were driven and, after the second volley, the ladder-bearers closed in and planted the ladders. Stones, arrows and darts from the smaller engines tore through the thronging fanatics, but fearlessly they pressed to the ladders and swarmed up.

Grimly the men-at-arms waited till the heads of the foremost climbers were within

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a yard of the tops of the ladders; then they dropped hundred-pound stones on their heads. A dozen ladders buckled in the middle and crashed down with their loads of men; others were stripped for half their length; and some stood, half-collapsed, blood-stained and bare; but, in an instant, these last were steadied and grew black with mounting assailants.

Four times the assault was repeated, each time with fewer ladders and greater ferocity; then the Mahdi gave the order to cease. As he stood forth to do so, Gian the One-Handed dropped a round pebble from his mouth into his sling and shot it straight to the mark. With a clang of metal, the Mahdi fell forward, his helmet split in two. A wail of horror rose from the Berber host.

"The Mahdi is dead," observed Gian calmly.

But, as he spoke, the Mahdi, raised in the arms of two fanatics, stirred and shook off his supporters. Howling with joy, his men came on again. The ranks divided; a score of men shot forth bearing a tree-trunk aimed straight at the door of the barbican.

A catapult whirred and a fire-bomb crashed to earth beneath the oncoming battering-ram. Instantly the bomb exploded, spattering the robes of the Berbers with flaming quicklime. Back surged the Almohades in panic. The tree-trunk lay where it fell, burning in the fierce liquid in spite of its greenness.

Lighter than the stones for which the machines were made, more fire-bombs now flew from the catapults, far into the heart of the retreating host. Flames spread through the long-robed, close-packed ranks. The Berbers shrieked and ran, burning the more terribly as their flight fanned the fire. Hindered by the press, some turned their simitars upon their comrades. The retreat became a rout.

Vainly the Mahdi strove to rally them with promises of paradise. Steel they would face; rocks hurled from battlements did not dismay them, but the fire which had consumed thirty thousand men outweighed any joys Allah could give the faithful. Sullenly they withdrew to their camp.

"WHY does not the Mahdi press on to Palermo, while yet he may?" asked Jaufré of Ian and Hawwas as the three stood together on the ramparts toward mid-afternoon. "His fellows have no heart left for further assaults; he has no siege-engines, and he can not hope to starve us out. Why does he linger here while the king's host gathers at Corleone?"

"Allah knows," said Hawwas piously.

"What are those Berbers doing in the fields," Ian wondered aloud, "walking about slowly with downcast heads and sticks in their hands?"

"Divining-rods!" exclaimed Hawwas. "They are seeking for springs of water. Ha, see the tall fellow by the olive-tree on the hillside. He has it! He stops!"

The man had indeed stopped; his shouts brought up a throng of Almohades. With the broad points of the spears, they dug busily for the underground water-course which the twisting motion of the beechen divining-rod had indicated. Soon nearly a hundred men were furiously digging. The garrison were powerless to stop them, for they were beyond the range of the most powerful catapults.

"It will do us no harm," Hawwas observed indifferently. "They would get water anyway from the cisterns of the town, and our supply will hold out forever. There is not much left in the tank, to be sure, since Heraclides drained it for his Greek fire, but the spring within the walls has not been dry since I first set eyes on Rocca Forte forty years ago."

Thus reassured, Ian troubled himself no more on that point.

The following night he entrusted the watch to Jaufré and lay down to sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion. At dawn he woke suddenly to find Hawwas by the bedside, pale and shaken.

"The castle spring is dry!" he gasped. "May Allah pity the wounded! The Mahdi has cut off our water-supply!"

"There is enough in the tank for two days," said Ian, "and much wine."

"The wine in our cellars will not suffice for more than three days at the most, for so many throats, and you well know that wine makes the last thirst worse than the first."

"We have five days," said Ian, rising and buckling on his sword. "By that time the king may come or the rains begin again."

"Five days at the most," answered Hawwas despondently, "and then——"

"And then," cried Ian, "we can throw open the gates, march out and die in the open!"

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CHAPTER XXII

THE LAST STAND

FOR three days the garrison prayed vainly for rain, rescue or even a renewal of the attack. The third day the Mahdi sent a black-robed emissary under a flag of truce. Admitted to the barbican, the herald announced:

"He whom Allah has sent bids me say that he knows your distress, the lack of water which tortures you, and will soon force you to surrender. He sends you this word: 'When your tongues are black and your throats swollen with thirst so that ye can no longer hold the walls, he will take this place and put all within it to the torture.' When the fire consuming your throats rages within you, think of the fire waiting for you in our camp and the flames of hell that will avenge those ye sent upon us from your walls!"

"Say to your master," Fulvia answered calmly, "that we will not be taken so long as life remains within us. From paradise we shall look down upon the pangs which the fiends will inflict on you and your false prophet!"

The unseasonable drought held; the rains did not fall, and the wine was low. By morning of the sixth day, every throat in the castle was burning. The night before, the last ration of wine had been doled out. Within twenty-four hours their strength would have ebbed so far that resistance would be impossible. The Mahdi knew and held his men out of catapult-range, waiting like vultures for the moment when the helmeted heads along the rampart would sink with exhaustion, when the torture of thirst would drive away all thought of fighting.

Hardly a man in that devoted garrison but saved out some of his wine-ration in the hope that his beloved mistress would accept it. Their sacrifice brought tears to Fulvia's eyes, but not even Ian could persuade her to drink one drop of that which he had hoarded for her. Jaufré, Denis, Gui, Hawwas, even Gian the One-Handed, would have given her their portions, but when they refused to drink, she smiled wanly and poured the precious liquid on the floor.

"We have lived here under the shadow of death together," she said, "and we will die together."

And so, on the morning of the sixth day, a council was held in the hall where the groans of the thirst-tortured wounded made a terrible chorus to the strange voices that issued from the swollen throats of the officers. Little time was wasted in talk. Each held the same opinion. The council decided that it was best to make a desperate sally and die fighting, in a forlorn attempt to cut their way through the Berber host. There was no hope of success, but they had held Rocca Forte for a week and had so depleted the Almohade forces that the king might be able to hold them off from Palermo, even though his army could not be half-assembled.

So, leaving a dozen men to work the catapults on the ramp, the garrison drew up in column and marched down to the barbican gate. First came the Scots and then the Norman men-at-arms, in two detachments, with Fulvia, Gulnar and Hawwas between. Last came the peasants, commanded by Gian the One-Handed and accompanied by Heraclides. Fulvia and Ian had agreed that, since they were all about to die, the Byzantine must atone for the cruelty of his revenge against Christodoulos by dying in a man's fight, with no stone walls or chemicals, but only his sword to aid him.

The gate was thrown open, and through it leaped the Scots, closely followed by the rest of the little garrison, reduced now to less than five hundred men. According to plan, they drew up with their backs to the barbican, the Highlanders across the road twenty paces in advance of the others, the Normans in a hollow square behind them, and the peasants forming the wings to the Norman center.

There they waited, while the Almohades poured out from their camp with fierce, exultant cries. In that last half-hour before death must envelop them, the Christians waited in resolute silence. There was but one who trembled—Heraclides, master of war by science and stratagem, now facing his first hand-to-hand fight. Physically weak, cursed with an imagination which pictured death in all its horrors, he was scarce able to stand erect for fright, yet he strove with all his pride to hide his terror. He was a Greek with the tradition of Marathon and Thermopylæ; he was a noble of the Byzantine Empire; his very name reminded him of the glorious pagan hero-legends of his ancestors. He leaned shivering on his sword, and his cowardly flesh

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wrestled mightily with his struggling soul. The fight within him was harder than the battle that was to come.

Ian's eyes were on the right-hand slope up which the assault must soon hurl itself upon them. His face was somber with the thoughts that tormented him. For himself and his men he feared nothing; in this way a man should die, but that such a death should come to Fulvia!

He started at the sound of her voice calling his name. He passed between his clansmen, and the Norman ranks opened to admit him. In the center of the square stood Fulvia and Gulnar; to protect them from stray thrusts or arrows, both wore armor. But how different they were! The Moslem girl, brave as she undoubtedly was, was pale; her figure, undisguised by the loose chain-mail, was almost ludicrous in the grim setting of the Norman lines.

But Fulvia, erect and boyish, seemed as much in place there as the bulky Jaufré himself. Her mail fitted her smartly, her shapely fingers clutched her sword-hilt with a strength that showed the sinews of her wrist. Her head was high, her eyes and lips glowed with the fever of thirst. Beautiful beyond other women, she was still the daughter of Arnulfo of the Iron Arm, and the proud courage of her house crowned her loveliness with an added glory.

Grasping Ian's hand and looking deep into his eyes without fear or embarrassment, she spoke:

"Ian Dhu, in a little while we shall be with the blessed saints and with my dear father and mother in heaven. There, all hearts are open, all desires known. It is right, therefore, that I tell you what you will know so soon. I shall die more proudly, more happily, if you know, in these last moments of our life on earth, that I love you. I think that you love me. Is it so?"

The fortitude that had sustained Ian so long could endure no more. Pledged to Gulnar, he had kept silence faithfully. Now he looked from Fulvia to Gulnar, unwilling to hurt the woman to whom he had given his promise, but his whole soul longing to respond to the glory of Fulvia's love. As he hesitated, it was the Moslem girl who saved him.

"Seignior Ian," she said steadily, "you may answer freely. I release you from your promise. I thought once that I loved you, but I have found a love that means more to me than yours. I have given my heart to Khaled ben-Zobair."

The blood in Ian's frozen heart seemed to melt and flood his being as rivers loosed by Spring flood their courses. He took Fulvia in his arms with a fierce tenderness. Her eyes still fixed on his, she kissed him once, then gently freed herself from his embrace.

"Père Franceis!" she called, and the white-haired chaplain of Rocca Forte stepped toward them from his place in the line of men-at-arms. Père Franceis had claimed his right that day to fight for Christ with the sword, and few could use that carnal weapon better than he. At a word from Fulvia, he removed his helmet and stood before them tonsured, shaven, but strong—the incarnation of the church militant. His fierce eyes glowed with sudden joy at Fulvia's command. Taking the hands of Ian and his lady, he joined them together; then, in a voice like a trumpet-call, he cried—

"Kneel, ye soldiers of the cross!"

The entire host knelt and, repeating the Latin words of the marriage service, Père Franceis gave Fulvia of Rocca Forte and Ian Dhu Mackay to each other in this world and the next. When the steel-clad ranks rose, he bade Ian kiss his wife and then cried in a jubilant voice:

"That which we have done this day neither the swords of the infidels nor the malice of Satan can undo. Bridegroom, go to your place and fight like a man for your bride!"

It was time, for the hillside before them was black with Berbers yelling in savage triumph, waving their gleaming simitars or tossing tufted spears. Far outflanking the Christians to right and left, they planned to enfold and crush them against the barbican wall. In the midst of the multitude rode the veiled Mahdi at the head of four-score horsemen. Noting them and knowing that the horses of the fleet had perished in the flames, Ian knew that they must have come overland from Palermo on the night of the landing.

The Berber ranks were almost formed. Knowing that the only chance—if chance it might be called—for Fulvia's life lay in instant and complete sacrifice of himself, Ian cried his war-cry and, at the head of his clansmen, charged.

Forward rushed the Highlanders. Their huge swords flashed in the morning sun and

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descended as one blade as they struck the front rank of their foes, which broke in mangled confusion before the Gaelic charge. Then, at a command from the Mahdi, those in the center gave way and the Berber host surged forward and engulfed the forty Highlanders as a tidal wave engulfs a headland.

THEIR rear resting on the barbican wall, their front a wall of overlapping shields, the Norman men-at-arms drove in their blades through mail and flesh as the Berber onslaught broke against them. Beside them the peasants paid Fulvia with their lives for the just kindness of her rule and for the protection she had accorded their wives and children in the past. Even in the death-agony, their arms twitched in the effort to strike again.

Heraclides was the first to fall. To the last he was afraid, but as the black terror of the Berber charge swept down upon them, his fear spurred him to a thing incredible. Alone, unbidden, he leaped forth from the line and flung himself with upraised sword in the midst of the enemy. A spear tore through his breast but, with the last ounce of his strength, he drove his blade through the helmet and skull of the man who wounded him. Then he died, his wizened face transfigured with a smile of exultation in his new-found courage.

The Normans could afford no relief to the hard-pressed peasants. The road before them was heaped with black-robed corpses; blood puddled about their feet and dripped from their sword-arms, their mail was rent, their shields cut and splintered, but still they fought on. The square was unbroken, though shrinking fast. The only breathing-space was when, ever and anon, the handful of men working the catapults on the wall above sent a stone crashing through the Berber ranks.

Neither men-at-arms nor peasants thought of their Scottish comrades now. Ian and his handful must be slain, and the living were too terribly occupied to think of the dead. Every energy was bent, every sinew strained to keep the Berber simitars from the lady of Rocca Forte within the square.

But Fulvia thought of nothing but Ian. She, too, felt sure that he was dead, and the thought roused within her the fire of a Brunhild. The spirit of her Viking ancestors pulsed in her blood. Standing behind Jaufré and Gui, she thrust over their shoulders at every black-robed figure that came within reach of her long, slender sword; time and again her blade drew Berber blood.

If she could have seen what was going on beyond the Berber masses, her heart would have been gladdened. Ian Dhu, with Dugall and a scant score of men, had torn their way through to the right bank of the road and now, poised on the brink of the hill, were wielding their great blades in downright back-strokes that tore great gaps in the Berber ranks. Ian was fighting in a cold fury; Dugall, his shaggy beard wet with the froth from his lips, was in a veritable berserker rage. The Highlanders fought with a savage frenzy such as they had never known against the usurper David or the infidels in the Holy Land. Surrounded by hundreds of simitars, they could not hold out another quarter of an hour, but they had written a glorious chapter in the history of Scottish valor.

Seeing that the Scots were doomed, the Mahdi detached all but a few score of his rear-guard and sent the hundreds thus released in a fresh charge against the sorely tried Norman square.

Suddenly, above the din, there burst a mighty shout from the men-at-arms on the walls, a shout of wonder and joy. A moment later, the gate in the barbican wall which formed the fourth side of the square was thrown open, and the dozen soldiers who had served the catapults burst through, sword in hand. Hastening to the weakest points, they lent new strength to the crumbling lines.

As they took their places, a strange, new note was heard in the tumult of battle—a murmur that swelled into a roar like the surf on a rocky strand. At last the Norman square, a mere shell of reeling and wounded men, swayed inward, and, at that moment, there came a shock that drove them back against the wall of the barbican. The square collapsed; Norman and Berber were swept together in through the open gateway.

Warned by the joyous cry from the battlements, the Mahdi, who had sat on his horse in the rear of his host, directing the attack, looked over his shoulder and saw, far down the road, a cloud of dust crested with shining points of steel. With a cry of fury, he spurred down the lines, shouting to his men,

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but they were deaf with the din of battle and blind with the fanatical hatred he had himself instilled. The castle was almost in their hands; there was no time, no need to think of anything else.

Seeing it was too late to save his army, the Mahdi, like a prudent general, left them to their fate. With a shout to his mounted bodyguard, he spurred his horse down the hill. The turn brought him close to where the handful of weary Scots were making their last stand, and, as he passed, Ian Dhu lashed out at him with a hungry blade. The blow fell short, but the last two inches of the steel sheared through the Mahdi's mail and cut a deep gash in his thigh. With a cry of pain, Abd el-Mumin rode over the crest and, followed by the men of his bodyguard, plunged down the hill into the interior.

Hardly had he disappeared when the hundred Berbers hemming in the Scots were shattered and swept away by a whirlwind of charging horsemen in gleaming mail. Ian stood staring after them, an image fixed upon his whirling vision. It was the image of Roger of Sicily, riding at the head of a great body of Norman cavalry, a dripping sword in his hand, his face alight with an awful joy. Then, as the king's horsemen charged past like a splendid pageant, Ian raised his red hand to clear his troubled eyesight; his knees quivered and he collapsed in a heap. He neither saw nor felt the wounded Dugall raise him up, nor heard the rending shock and the cries of dismay as the king fell upon the doomed Almohade host. He did not see Khaled ben-Zobair sweep past at the head of the mounted palace guard, nor did he know what took place between the spot where he had held out so long and the corpse-choked barbican gate.

There, borne into the open gateway, Fulvia and Gulnar found themesleves the center of a savage mêlée. About them, Jaufré, Gui and a little knot of men-at-arms were holding off thrice as many Berbers. Fulvia's helmet had been knocked off, and her glorious golden hair rioted about her shoulders.

Suddenly the ring of Berbers was burst apart, and mounted men towered above them. Swords flashed and the Berbers fell beneath a score of bloody blades.

Dizzy with weariness, Fulvia looked up at her rescuers. The foremost was a tall, powerful man in unadorned mail, with piercing eyes and a dark, lion-like face. His heavy sword rested across his horse's neck. His pointed helmet was encircled with a golden diadem. Fulvia knew that she stood in the presence of the king.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE KING'S WILL

"AS YOUR Majesty says, he is quite sound. He has lost blood enough to kill an old man like me, but he has no serious wound and no fever."

Roused to consciousness at the sound of the words of Ibn Hawwas, Ian opened his eyes. He found himself lying on a cot in the great hall, among the cots of many other wounded men. Over him, her face radiant with joy and tenderness, bent Fulvia. Fulvia lived! At the realization, a great tide of happiness swept through his whole being.

Her arm supporting him, Ian strove to rise. He found his laft arm bandaged to his side and his body strangely weak, but he could stand. Before him he now perceived the king seated in a carved oak chair behind which stood a group of notables. Among them was Dugall Mor shamelessly sobbing with relief. At a word from Roger, Jaufré brought another chair, and into this Ian sank.

"I rejoice," said Roger of Sicily, "that my coming was not longer delayed. Otherwise a very gallant gentleman would have perished in my service. But for you, Seignior Ian, and for the Lady Fulvia and Khaled ben-Zobair, I should now be without kingdom and without life. Truly it was God who sent you from your own far land to save His people here. His ways are wonderful and a rebuke to the proud. Through you, he has rebuked my pride.

"The Mahdi was more cunning, more terrible than we dreamed. When Hugo the Hammer stormed the *khalsa* the day after you left Palermo, he found that the Mahdi and many of his Berbers had escaped from the old harbor fort, doubtless in boats under cover of darkness. Knowing that he would strike Rocca Forte, I set out for Corleone where the feudal army was to gather.

"Hardly had I left Palermo when a second insurrection broke out behind me. Great was the peril to the city, for I had taken Hugo with me and even Khaled with his palace guard, but God has a care for Sicily. Within fourteen hours after my

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departure, George of Antioch sailed into the Golden Shell, returned from glorious victories over Constantinople. His sailors put down the Almohades and now hold the city.

"A swift messenger bore me the news that, in the course of his voyage west, George's galleys had fallen in with a huge Berber fleet making for the shore. He attacked and cut them to pieces. This second Berber fleet was a danger of which we had never known till it was past.

"The Mahdi knew nothing of the disaster which had befallen this second fleet of his and counted on it to seize and occupy western Sicily while he, with the remnant of his flotilla, captured Rocca Forte.

"The day after the admiral's message reached me, as the levies began to assemble at Corleone, came a spy of Khaled's who had mingled with the Berber host and learned that the garrison of Rocca Forte were doomed to perish of thirst. At once I rode to the rescue and, as you know, arrived in time. For this mercy of God, I vow to build a cathedral to Our Lady of Monreale."

The chaplain, Père Franceis, now spoke.

"Praise the saints!" he cried so that all heard him. "Our king, half a Moslem for forty years, now speaks like a Christian!"

Roger blushed to his hair but smiled.

"The Seignior Ian has converted me," he said. "My Moslem subjects shall always find me merciful, but the example of one fearless Christian, who put his faith above life, worked so powerfully on my soul that I will never again compromise with Heaven.

"But I have a word for the Lady Fulvia. I have always dealt tenderly with the daughter of my old champion and friend, Arnulfo of the Iron Arm, but you know now that it takes a man to hold Rocca Forte. Therefore I can not permit you to remain unmarried any longer. What say you? Will you take a husband at last?"

"I have learned my lesson, gracious Majesty," Fulvia answered. "I consent to marry."

"Good! What say you to—Khaled?"

Realizing that Roger spoke in jest, Fulvia answered in kind.

"It is not lawful," she said, "for a Christian to marry a Moslem. Besides, Khaled has made another choice."

She called and Gulnar entered the hall. Roger's eyes opened wide.

"What!" he cried. "Zobeida!"

"Not now," Fulvia answered. "Gulnar, one time Sultana of Iconium."

Roger's royal composure deserted him.

"Is this true?" he cried.

Khaled left the group behind the royal chair and bowed. Gulnar fell on her knees before the king. Roger beckoned Khaled to approach and, joining his vizier's hand to Gulnar's, he said:

"She is worthy of you both in blood and in beauty. Ye shall be married in the Mosque of Ali, and your union will go far toward establishing the loyalty of my Mohammedan subjects forever.

"But we must dispose of your case, Fulvia. Whom will you marry?"

Now it was Fulvia's turn to kneel.

"If it please your Majesty, I am married."

"What!" roared Roger, leaping to his feet. "Married without my consent? Who has dared to take your hand?"

Ian rose unsteadily and faced Roger.

"I have dared!" he said boldly. "The Lady Fulvia was married to me in the face of the enemy, when death threatened to part us. Now that life has united us again, neither vassal nor king shall sever us!"

Before the king could speak, Gui de la Garde sprang to Ian's side and cried:

"By the love I bear this lady, and by the friendship I have sworn to Ian Dhu, my shield is between them and any who would part them!"

"Peace, foolish children!" spoke the deep voice of the king. "I was but sounding the girl's heart. She has chosen the man whom I would have chosen for her. But I will not see her throw herself away on a man who owns no lands, however high his birth may be. Seignior Ian, do you intend to return to Scotland?"

Somewhat sadly, Ian replied:

"I have no home in Scotland now. Of the twelvescore men of my clan who followed me to Palestine, but a handful still live. My country would be for me a land of ghost-faces. With your Majesty's consent, I will remain here, for here are those who remain to me and here dwells my wife."

"Your answer gladdens my heart, for I could ill afford to lose," said Roger, laying his hand on the Scot's shoulder.

"You have gained a lovely wife, and I have gained a valiant subject. May the saints give you happiness and every blessing! Seigniors all, render your compliments and greetings to the Lord Ian, Count of Rocca Forte and of Castrocavalli!"

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MANY A SLIP

by Carl Clausen

DABNER, first mate of the *Stormbird*, was a man of few friends. He was in his early thirties, but he looked older. His eyes were small, close-set and almost lidless. His heavy, bloodless lips hung slightly parted, disclosing two rows of yellow, tobacco-stained teeth. His diminutive pointed ears hugged his close-cropped hair too high above the line of the eyebrows.

This man was walking up and down his cabin glancing furtively through the open port-hole at the lights of Sydney in the distance, listening to the *Stormbird* straining at her cable on the tide of Raynor Basin.

Dabner was about to commit murder. He had weighed the chances of detection carefully. There was nothing by which the crime could be fastened upon him. For the tenth consecutive time he rehearsed the details, after carefully locking the cabin door. He even raised the pistol he had stolen from the locker in Captain Stark's cabin and pointed it at the reflection of his own face in the crinkly mirror over his bunk. This was to accustom himself to look into the face of his victim before he killed him.

Captain Stark, the skipper of the *Stormbird*, his intended victim, perhaps richly deserved the fate awaiting him. Stark was a deep-sea sailor of the worst type. There are still a few of his kind left today. His record was a black one. He had bullied his way from boatswain to mate, and from mate to captain. It was whispered that he had shot a man off the main-yard in the China Sea for answering back, and that he had killed another with the blow of an iron belaying-pin in a storm off Cape Hope. So it was that he richly deserved the fate awaiting him; the wonder was that no one had done it long since.

At Singapore, when paying off Dabner after the *Stormbird* had discharged her cargo, Captain Stark had cheated Dabner of four pounds, ten, in a small matter of smuggling. The two men had carried on a lucrative little side-line in narcotics along the Straits Settlements, unbeknown to the owners of the *Stormbird*. Dabner's share in the venture was ninety shillings short. Stark had thrown him the remainder of his money with the remark that he was lucky to get that much.

Dabner was a saver. In other men this would have been a virtue. In Dabner it was a besetting sin. In safe-deposit boxes in Sydney he had stacks of golden sovereigns. He did not bank his money in the usual way through the teller's window, lest the bank in failing should rob him of his hoard. Safe-deposit boxes were immune from all liability in the misfortunes of banks, and besides he could descend at will into the vaults, open his boxes and let the smooth, velvety sovereigns trickle through his stubby fingers. His trips to sea were garnering-excursions wherefrom he returned to fondle his golden hoard and add to it more sovereigns.

The loss of the four pounds, ten, was gall, wormwood, to Dabner. It roused him to a fury unspeakable. Because of the loss of

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this comparatively insignificant amount he had decided to murder Captain Stark.

Dabner placed the revolver on the table. His lips parted widely. It was not a smile. A smile was foreign to a nature like Dabner's. The movement of his lips was a grimace. He, himself, would have called it a smile. But Dabner had not in him the grace of simple things that make men smile. His soul was a hideous, leprous thing.

The killing of Stark with his own gun was part of the carefully laid plot; indeed, the most vital part. By this he could fasten the guilt of the crime upon another. This other one was the sailor, Evans. Evans was at this moment confined in the brig as punishment for gross insubordination.

Dabner hated Evans even more than he hated Captain Stark. The reason was Evans's girl, Annie Riley, a barmaid at the Empire pub on George Street, Sydney.

Dabner's lips grew moist as he thought of Annie. For months Dabner had forced his unwelcome attentions upon the girl. Annie was the kind that knows dross from eighteen carat. She was wise in the ways of men. She loved Evans and despised Dabner. There was a tacit understanding between her and Evans that, as soon as the little Welshman got his mate's certificate, they would get married and set up housekeeping in a little cottage facing the harbor on the hills overlooking Raynor Basin. So, when Dabner singled Annie out among the other barmaids and hung over her end of the bar leering at her, she grew troubled and uneasy.

Once, in a moment of financial recklessness, when the girl's beauty had struck a deep, sinister chord in his sordid soul, Dabner asked her to go to a show with him, displaying a handful of golden sovereigns as Annie bent over the bar and drew him a glass of foaming dark ale. Her frank blue eyes met his across the foaming glass. She shook her head.

"No go, bloke. Ye're wastin' yer time. Try Lizz. She's not partic'lar whose money she spends."

With this she turned her back upon Dabner and busied herself with another customer. Dabner bit his lips and held his peace.

He decided that his chances with Annie were slim as long as Evans was in the offing. He also decided that to win Annie by fair means was beyond him. In some disagreeable moment of self-appraisement he realized his failings. It made him furious in a beastly, impotent way. He began to consider removing Evans, or, at least, eliminating the man as an obstacle to Annie.

Evans was about to apply for his mate's certificate. One more trip to sea and he would be entitled to it. If Dabner could prevent Evans getting his certificate, the nuptials of Annie and the little Welshman would be indefinitely postponed.

The next day he sought out Evans and asked him if he were looking for a berth as A. B. Evans said he was. Dabner signed him on the articles of the *Stormbird* for six months for a trip along the Straits Settlements.

When Evans spoke to Annie about it that evening she frowned. She told him about Dabner's invitation. Evans took the girl in his arms and laughed long and loudly, so sure was he of Annie and his own ability to keep her.

"Just the same," Annie said gravely, "ye'd better watch yer step. That Dabner man is a snake, I'm tellin' ye. He'll be doin' fer ye some day if he gets a chanst."

"He'll not get the chanst, never fear," Evans laughed easily.

Annie looked away. She was afraid for her man. She loved him much. She had awakened in Evans something that made her breathless and tender-eyed.

THE *Stormbird* had not been more than two days out of Sydney when Dabner began riding Evans. The little Welshman remembered Annie's words and fought back. Captain Stark, aware of Dabner's little game, shrugged his shoulders and ordered Evans put in the brig. Evans spent about one-third of his time in the brig for insubordination, so Dabner was pleased. His little scheme was working nicely.

When the *Stormbird* sailed south inside the Great Barrier reef a sudden inspiration came to Dabner. At first the possibility of the thing almost took his breath away. It seemed so simple and easy. When the *Stormbird* swung clear of Port Chalmers Heads, his plans were perfected. Evans was in the brig again. Opportunity was knocking loudly at Dabner's door. In murdering Captain Stark he could settle an old score, and, by accusing Evans of the murder, the little Welshman would be automatically removed from his path.

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His almost lidless eyes narrowed to mere slits in the contemplation of what he meant to do. He took into consideration every minute detail, every necessary move immediately before and after the deed had been done. Evans's motive for murdering Captain Stark was there. What could be more natural in revenge for being put in the brig?

It was all so simple and natural. Fate had played into Dabner's hands. He felt almost a chill of apprehension at the perfect dovetailing of the events of fate. The door of the brig opened into the officers' messroom. After shooting Stark, Dabner intended to unlock—not open, but just unlock—the door of the brig.

Upon hearing the shot and the key turn in the lock, Evans would come forth to investigate. Dabner would rush on deck, call the crew together and return to the messroom, where they would find Evans alone with Stark's dead body.

Dabner wondered if Evans would pick up the gun which he, Dabner, intended to drop carelessly on the floor as he ran up the steps after firing it. He could hardly hope for such good fortune. Anyhow, the presence of the prisoner in the same room with the dead captain and a pistol with one shell fired was enough to convince the most skeptical of juries.

When the *Stormbird* dropped her anchor in Raynor Basin an hour before midnight, a quarter of a mile off the foot of George Street, Dabner smiled to himself. He was pleased, hugely pleased. With one stroke he'd remove two of his bitterest enemies.

Now that the moment for which he had waited so patiently was drawing near, Dabner felt a brutal, uneasy desire to have it over with. He did not fear for the miscarriage of his plans; they were too well laid. His heavy, passionless face grew tense. His small eyes roved about the cabin furtively as he listened for Captain Stark's footsteps down the companionway ladder. Stark had been pacing the bridge for an hour, smoking, after the crew had turned in and the port watch was established.

Evans, the prisoner in the brig, was seated on a coil of rope gazing dispiritedly at the lights of George Street through the open port-hole, little dreaming of the sinister preparations for his undoing which were going on in Dabner's cabin fifty feet away. Evans's thoughts were not pleasant ones. He saw himself disqualified by the Board of Navigation because of his insubordination. Annie's words of warning six months earlier had come true. Dabner had done for him.

He shook his fist in the direction of the mate's cabin. If only the port-hole were an inch and a half larger! The distance to the foot of George Street was easy for a good swimmer like himself. If only he could get to the police station and tell his version of the story before Stark and Dabner got there, he might be able to save himself. He ground his teeth in impotent rage.

It was after one o'clock when Captain Stark finally knocked the ashes from his pipe and went below. Dabner heard his heavy footsteps descending the companionway ladder and pass his door. The skipper walked through the messroom and opened the door of his private cabin. Taking a book from the rack above his bunk, he returned to the messroom, took a chair at the table and began to read.

Dabner, in his cabin, listened breathlessly. Fate was playing into his hands. To kill Stark in the messroom, instead of in his private cabin, was even better.

STEALTHILY Dabner made his final preparations. He divested himself of all clothing save his underclothes, shirt and socks. Upon his hands he drew a pair of red woolen mittens, after which he wiped the revolver carefully with oil that no finger-prints of his might show.

Then he crossed the threshold of his cabin, passed down the runway and walked boldly into the messroom. Captain Stark looked up from his book in surprize and stared at Dabner in his unusual garb. His eyes fell upon the pistol in Dabner's mittened hand. In an instant he knew what was coming. His book dropped to the floor. His hands grasped the arms of his chair convulsively.

"Dabner!" he gasped. "For God's sake, don't kill me!"

Dabner raised the revolver and fired point-blank at Stark's wide, staring eyes. The skipper sank back in his chair without a sound.

Quick as a flash Dabner tossed the weapon on the floor, tore the bunch of keys from Captain Stark's belt and, selecting the largest one, unlocked the door of the brig where Evans was confined. Then he

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turned quickly, thrust the bunch of keys into the dead man's hand and ran out of the messroom into the hall and up the companionway ladder. As he ran he pulled off his mittens. Passing his own door, he threw them on to the bunk.

"Murder! Murder! Captain killed!" he shouted as he ran up the steps. At the break of the poop he almost collided with the watchman.

"Quick, Joe! Rouse the crew! Evans has killed the skipper!" he gasped, following the man forward.

Three minutes later a sleepy-eyed crowd in various stages of undress, led by Dabner, elbowed each other through the messroom door. In a chair under the swinging lamp sat Captain Stark's dead body with the blood streaming down its face from a hole in the middle of the forehead. Otherwise the messroom was empty.

Dabner blinked his eyes. The pistol was lying on the floor where he had tossed it. A thin wreath of smoke curled from its blue muzzle toward the low ceiling. A momentary spasm of fear took possession of Dabner. Had something gone wrong? Beckoning the crew to follow him, he crossed the messroom floor and opened the door of the brig. Evans was gone. The light of the messroom lamp fell into the empty space. Pushing the door of Stark's cabin open, he found that empty also.

A sickening, horrible fear came over Dabner. Something had gone wrong. His lips grew moist with fright, but the reassuring comment of the boatswain steadied him.

"He must have run on deck and jumped over the side," the boatswain said. "Evans is a husky swimmer."

Dabner nodded, relieved.

"Sure, that's it. Come on, boys, lower the starboard boat," he shouted, pushing his way through the crowd up the companionway ladder. "Step lively! He's only got a five-minute start."

When the boat swung off the davits, Dabner sprang into the stern and pushed off. For an hour Dabner with four oarsmen cruised back and forth across the bay without result. Evans had made a clean getaway. Dabner comforted himself with the thought that the Welshman would be apprehended soon after daylight.

The important thing to do was to notify the police at once to be on the lookout for the escaped man and thus direct suspicion from himself. It was plain that Evans, upon hearing the shot and seeing Stark's dead body in the chair, had realized his compromising position and had deemed it wiser to run for it rather than face trial with such damning evidence piled up against him.

Steering the boat for the telephone booth on the end of the lumber wharf at the foot of Market Street, Dabner rang up the police station and reported.

"Dabner, mate of the *Stormbird* talking. Captain Stark has been killed in his cabin by Evans, a sailor. Can you send a patrol-boat at once? We're at anchor in Raynor Basin."

The desk sergeant at the other end asked a few quick questions and rang off. The patrol-boat would be alongside the *Stormbird* in half an hour.

Dabner returned to the waiting boat at the foot of the pier and rowed quickly to the *Stormbird*.

When he got back Dabner went below and looked around. Everything was just as he had left it. He felt very confident now. Evans would be apprehended during the day.

INSPECTOR SHALE came aboard with the patrol-boat and a detective at about three-thirty. Dabner felt not the slightest misgivings when he shook hands with Shale.

Inspector Shale was a tall, soft-spoken man with a friendly, agreeable manner that put one instantly at ease. He never became excited. When on the trail of a murderer, his attitude was one of seemingly careless indifference. He went about his business with a weary sort of detachment that was disarming, but he got results.

When he swung himself leisurely over the railing of the *Stormbird* and stepped to the deck, Dabner met him.

"Mr. Dabner, I presume?" Shale drawled pleasantly, extending his hand.

"Yes," said Dabner steadily.

He was prepared to meet Shale's eyes without flinching, but it was not necessary. The inspector dropped his eyes absently and followed Dabner down the companionway ladder. In the open door of the messroom Shale stopped and glanced about. His eyes seemed to avoid the dead figure in the chair.

"Sure he's dead?" he drawled.

Dabner grinned.

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"Shot between the eyes. Dead is right," the mate said.

"The lamp was burning when the crime was committed?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Where were you?"

"In my bunk, asleep."

"You were awakened by the shot?"

Dabner considered for a moment.

"Well, no. I heard voices. Evans arguing with the skipper—then the shot," he lied glibly.

"Hm! Sure it was Evans's voice?"

"Sure."

"What did you do?"

"As soon as I heard the shot I sprang out of my bunk and ran into the messroom. Evans was standing there near the table with the gun in his hand." Dabner pointed to the right. "The skipper was dead in his chair."

Shale nodded, advanced to the chair and looked at Captain Stark absently. He took the bunch of keys from the dead man's fingers and glanced at the open door of the brig.

"Evans had been in the brig for four days," Dabner volunteered. "I guess the skipper took a notion to open the door and talk some sense into his head. Evans is a bad actor. We had to keep him locked up most of the time." He pointed to the largest key in the bunch. "That's the key to the brig."

"I see," Shale drawled.

Dabner opened the door of the brig and Shale stepped within the dark space for a moment. He poked a pile of canvas with his foot, while Dabner stood in the open doorway watching him.

"We use it as a sail locker sometimes when we're crowded for room," the mate explained.

Shale nodded and returned to the cabin. Picking up the gun from the floor under the table, he broke it and peered through the barrel.

"Whose gun?" he asked.

"The skipper's," Dabner answered easily.

"Ah! Shot Stark with his own gun?"

"Yes."

"Anybody handle this since the shot was fired except Evans?"

"No, sir."

"Hm."

Inspector Shale looked at the pistol thoughtfully, wrapped it in his handkerchief and placed it in his pocket.

"Skipper's cabin?" he asked, pointing to the door of Stark's cabin.

Dabner nodded.

Shale stepped to the door and glanced within.

"Where's your cabin?"

Dabner jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Out there. We passed it on our way down the stairs."

"Let me see it please."

"Certainly, inspector."

Dabner led the way with a triumphant smile on his heavy lips. Things were going according to schedule. Shale stepped across the threshold and looked about.

"You were in your bunk, you said?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Undressed, of course?"

"Yes."

The inspector craned his neck over the edge of the bunk.

"Yours, I presume?" he asked, pointing to the red woolen mittens.

Dabner caught his breath and glanced at Shale covertly. The inspector's expression was pleasantly interrogative. Dabner felt reassured.

"Oh, yes, certainly," he answered, relieved.

"Did you happen to notice the exact time the shot was fired?" Shale queried.

"Five minutes to two," Dabner answered firmly. "I happened to glance at the clock over the lamp-locker in the messroom. You can see it from here if you'll step into the runway."

Shale's eyes followed his finger.

"Oh, yes," he answered.

Together they ascended the companionway stairs. Shale spoke a few words to the detective who accompanied him and then turned to Dabner.

"I'm going to ask you to take your meals ashore for a day or so, Mr. Dabner. I'll post Sullivan here at the entrance. If there is anything you need in your cabin, please get it right away. I don't want anything disturbed for the next twelve hours."

"Very well, inspector," Dabner answered.

"Another thing," Shale added. "Where can you be found at say ten o'clock this morning? I'd like to have you step up to headquarters and make a formal affidavit."

"I'll be at the South Pacific Trading Company's office—that's my owners—about

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that time," said Dabner. "If you'll leave a message for me, I'll come right up."

Shale considered for a moment.

"The office is on Allen Street?" he asked.

"Allen and King."

"Very well, Mr. Dabner; thank you."

AT NINE-THIRTY Dabner walked into the office of the owners of the *Stormbird*. Mr. Markham, the boss, was not in.

The bookkeeper was alone on his high stool inside the wicket. When Dabner entered, the bookkeeper's wrinkled face grew a shade paler. He handed Dabner a note through the wicket and said:

"Mr. Markham is at the police station waiting for you. He said not to mind about the freight statements till later."

Dabner looked at the note and grinned pleasantly.

"I'll go right over. You heard all about it, I s'pose?"

The bookkeeper nodded.

"Yes, I heard."

His eyes avoided Dabner's, but the mate felt in a jocular mood.

"Gave you fellows a jolt, I'll bet," he said. "I wonder if they got a line on Evans?"

"Evans is at Headquarters now, I believe," the bookkeeper answered.

Dabner smiled broadly.

"You don't say? Quick work! Leave it to Shale. He's a wizard, is Shale. I see Evans's finish."

The bookkeeper turned his face away and busied himself with his ledger.

"Well, I guess I must be on my way," Dabner said. He crumpled the note in his hand and tossed it into the waste-basket near the door after reading it.

"I guess you'd better hurry," the bookkeeper agreed without raising his face from the ledger. "They have been waiting for you for half an hour."

In Inspector Shale's private office, Dabner found Mr. Markham, his boss, talking to Shale at the inspector's table. A couple of detectives lounged in the far corner of the room.

Shale looked up from his table as Dabner entered.

"Sit down, Mr. Dabner," he said pleasantly, indicating a chair facing the desk. One of the detectives sauntered over to the door through which Dabner had just entered and turned the key in the lock. Dabner saw the motion and squinted uneasily at the inspector and Mr. Markham.

Shale leaned across the table and regarded Dabner kindly.

"You're quite sure that you saw Evans in the messroom when you ran out to give the alarm, Mr Dabner?" he drawled pleasantly.

"Oh, yes. Sure! Nobody but Evans."

Dabner's eyes shifted from one to the other. Mr. Markham glanced away.

"Couldn't be mistaken in the man, I suppose?"

"No. I'd know Evans anywhere."

Shale closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair.

"That's peculiar!" he murmured.

Mr. Markham cleared his throat. The detective at the door glanced at his fingernails. Dabner moved uneasily in his chair.

"When you came into the room, Evans was standing at the table with the gun in his hand?"

Shale asked the question without opening his eyes.

"Yes, sir."

"You glanced at the clock. It was five minutes to two?"

"Well, perhaps six or seven," Dabner corrected. "I might be out a couple of minutes."

The inspector opened his eyes and waved his hand airily.

"We'll make allowances for your excitement. Two minutes more or less in this case makes no difference."

He leaned across the table and glanced at the calendar on the opposite wall, absently.

"No, Dabner, two minutes makes no difference to speak of," he repeated almost to himself.

He turned on Dabner, pointed his long, bony finger at him across the table and said—

"Dabner, it won't work."

The mate's small eyes narrowed angrily.

"What won't work?" he demanded.

"Putting it on to Evans," Shale answered. "You killed Captain Stark, yourself, Dabner."

Dabner laughed.

"Switch your brand. I saw Evans with my own eyes."

Shale opened the drawer of the table and pulled out one of Dabner's red woolen mittens and laid it upon the table. Dabner

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stared at it. He tried to speak but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. Shale took from his vest-pocket a small piece of folded paper and opened it carefully. With his thumb and forefinger he drew from the paper a small fine fleck of red wool and held it up in the light before Dabner's eyes. The mate's face turned livid.

"Dabner," he said slowly, "I found this piece of wool caught on the trigger of Captain Stark's gun."

He laid the fleck of wool upon the red mitten.

"A perfect match, Dabner. Perfect!"

Dabner swallowed hard.

"It's a lie," he cried. "You put it there yourself."

Shale shook his head wearily.

"It's no use, Dabner," he said.

He made a motion to the detective at the door.

"Bring them in," he said briefly.

THE next moment Evans was ushered into the room. With him was Annie Riley. The girl gave Dabner a quick glance and turned her eyes away.

"Sit down, both of you," Shale said, pointing to some chairs near the wall.

He turned to Dabner.

"It may interest you to know, Dabner, that Evans here has not been aboard the *Stormbird* since midnight last night."

"Like —— he hasn't!" Dabner cried. "Didn't I see him myself in the messroom with the gun in his hand at five minutes to two?"

His voice was shrill with suppressed fear.

"You did not, Dabner," Shale said steadily. "At precisely half an hour after midnight Evans came to headquarters and laid charges against you and Captain Stark for riding him on the trip. He's been here ever since. When you shot Captain Stark, Evans was not within two miles of the *Stormbird*. He never knew that Captain Stark was dead until I told him myself."

Shale paused and wagged his head at Dabner.

"Your plans were well laid, Dabner, except for one thing. If you had looked into the brig you'd have noticed that the port-hole frame had been unscrewed. That was where you slipped up. Evans is a little man, Dabner, but a resourceful one. With the broken end of the steel clew-eye of one of the old sails stored in the brig he loosened the screws. The port-hole, without the frame, just permitted his small body to pass. It saved Evans and fixed you. Evans is a fine swimmer. Why did you kill Captain Stark?"

Dabner tried to rise from his chair. His lips moved spasmodically.

"It's a lie!" he shrieked.

"Take him away," Shale said wearily to the detectives.

There was a brief struggle. Dabner was led away screaming and kicking. The inspector glanced at Mr. Markham, rose and walked over to where Evans and the girl were sitting and shook hands with them.

"I believe Mr. Markham wants to speak with you, Evans," he said glancing over his shoulder at Mr. Markham. Evans got up. Annie followed him to the table. Mr. Markham cleared his throat.

"How soon can you get ready to go up for examination Mr. Evans?" he asked.

"In a week," Evans answered. "I have been reading up for a year."

Mr. Markham smiled at Annie and put his hand on the little Welshman's shoulder.

"I'll hold the job open for a fortnight, Mr. Evans," he said kindly. "When you get your papers from the board bring them down to the office. I think you'll make a good first mate for the *Stormbird*." He winked at Annie. "Our company prefers married men."

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CHECKERS AT HUNGRY HORSE

by Robert J Horton

Author of "The Gulch of the Lonesome Winds."

BOYER, man-hunter, paused on the summit of a high rocky ridge and, shading his eyes against the sun's glare on the snow, peered across the valley to where a rock-bound cleft showed dark and ugly at its upper end.

It was a long, wide-lung valley with easy slopes that reached to granite buttresses flanking the guarding peaks. The slopes, however, were scarred with gulches where the shale rock loomed in big, black blotches. The pines were smothered in a blanket of white, for there had been no wind since the last storm to shake the snow-gobs from the branches. A depression—barely discernible—midway between the sloping sides marked the course of Thimble Creek.

Boyer removed his mittens and drew his binoculars from the case affixed to the belt of his heavy mackinaw. Slowly he swept the upper and lower reaches of the valley; steadily he searched the gulches for signs of smoke which would indicate cabins occupied. Finally he leveled his glass on the black cleft at the upper end of the valley and grunted in satisfaction.

"Maybe there; maybe in the gulch straight across—one or the other," he droned to himself.

He had seen the smoke signs.

Boyer looked less like an officer than like a woodsman or miner or one of those other classes of men which ply various and hardy trades in the mountains. He was small, swarthy, wiry, with keen black eyes that glowed like coals or danced like sunbeams, according to his mood. He was lightning itself with his gun and he seldom lost a trail. He usually brought back his man, but in the present instance he was unusually handicapped.

The stage from Judith to the sapphire mines had been stopped a week before at a point some sixteen miles from its destination, and the driver had been relieved of a small metal box containing nearly ten thousand dollars in cash—a sum required to meet the monthly pay-roll at the mines. Nor was that all, for, when the stage had proceeded some three miles on its way after the hold-up, it was stopped again. This time the bandit took a sack of flour, a ham, salt pork, beans, coffee and other provisions, and then attempted to brain the driver by throwing a loaded salt-sack billy or "sap" at him.

In the opinion of the driver both robberies had been performed by the same man. It was late afternoon and the light had been bad, but the driver felt certain that there had been but one bandit and that he had cut across the hill after the first hold-up to intercept him the second time.

Boyer pondered this as he sat and rested after scrutinizing the valley through his power glasses. It had seemed simple of solution: The bandit, realizing that he needed food to carry him across the mountains to safety, had returned for it; or he had suddenly decided to "hold up" in the hills until he could leave them by the same route

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he had used in entering and thus avoid crossing the divide. This last seemed the more probable.

What quantity of provisions the bandit had been able to pack with him, Boyer did not know; neither did he know where the robber had cached what he could not carry. A disconcerting feature was the fact that there were no tracks leading over the hill and no tracks leading to or from the road near the scene of either robbery. In the absence of tell-tale snow-prints Boyer had concluded that the bandit had held to the road and in some way overtaken the stage for the second hold-up; then he had waited until night, had escaped into the mountain fastnesses by boldly slipping up one of the much-used paths near the mines and had thus avoided leaving a trail from the road. He could not have returned to Judith, for news of the robbery had been telephoned down on the mining company's wire.

It was clever work and he was looking for a very clever and dangerous man—"Big Nose" Charley.

Boyer never had seen Big Nose Charley, nor would he be able to recognize him by any such facial distinction as the nickname implied, for Charley did not have a big nose. Early in his career in Canada he had been called "Big Noise" because of a predilection toward loud talk. One day a compositor on a small paper had made a typographical error, omitting the i, and Charley had been referred to as "Big Nose." It had been Big Nose ever since, because, while he had been able to live down the habit of loud talking, he could not lose the accidental appellation bestowed upon him.

Big Nose Charley had a reputation as a killer; it was said of him that he was afraid of nothing on earth. His reputed speed with his guns was almost a tradition.

From Rieubalt, a gambler in Judith who hailed originally from Montreal and who claimed to have seen Big Nose in Cutbank headed south, Boyer had learned that that man had crossed the line and entered the States.

"Just Charley's style," the gambler had said.

He told of other hold-ups similar to this which Charley had staged.

"I'd bet a thousand he did it."

But in a week's time Boyer had run across no track of Big Nose Charley, nor of any one else, for that matter, whom he could associate with the hold-ups.

He wanted particularly to bring in Big Nose Charley. He did not care especially about the glory—Charley never had been brought in anywhere by anybody—but he did not want a man with so weighty a reputation and so handy at foul deeds at large in his territory.

His search had taken him across the Little Bear Divide to Thimble Creek. This was the nearest valley, sufficiently inaccessible to attract a man fleeing from the sapphire mines vicinity with the idea of remaining any length of time.

He had not expected to find any of the cabins there occupied so late in the Winter. Instead he had seen smoke rising from two. There could be but one reason for any one remaining in Thimble Creek valley for the Winter—desire for concealment.

BOYER rose from the rock upon which he had been resting and cheerfully began to descend the long slope. He kept well within the shelter of the pine-growth and found the going comparatively easy. The snow was not deep under the trees and had been packed somewhat by the gobs falling from the branches after previous storms. Indeed, he had not found it necessary to wear the snow-shoes which were strapped to his back.

He made his way slowly toward the gulch on the opposite side of the valley—the gulch from which he had seen one of the smoke signals rising.

When he reached the open, snow-covered, frozen creek-bed he paused while he again scanned the vicinity carefully. Here he was hidden from the gulch toward which he was heading by the timber on the opposite slope. Also, he was hidden from the upper end of the valley where he had seen the other smoke signal, but instinct bade him be mindful of ambush. He saw no tracks, heard no sound, and he darted swiftly across the open space and again gained the shelter of the trees.

Two hours later he emerged from the tree-growth on a trail leading into the gulch. At the entrance he noted with apparent satisfaction that a well-packed trail led from that point along the side of the mountain up the valley.

With his arrival in the gulch his attitude and method changed abruptly. The shale rock sides, bare of timber, offered no concealment, so he walked swiftly, silently up

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the trail, alert for any movement, any noise. He removed the glove from his right hand and thrust that member into a deep, wide pocket of his mackinaw close to the butt of the gun protruding from its holster.

Rounding a turn, he suddenly found himself at a cabin.

He strode swiftly to the door, his right hand now free, and knocked loudly. He stepped a pace to the right. The door opened almost immediately and a girl stood in the aperture.

"Come in," she invited.

It was the common hospitality of the hills. Every one—any one—is welcome at a cabin in the mountain wilderness, unless the cabin harbors one who can not afford to risk commingling with his fellow creatures.

Boyer entered a bit warily. In an instant he had noted the cabin's contents and its one occupant besides the girl.

On a bunk to the left of the door reposed an old man, white-haired, ruddy, massive of frame, but apparently helpless.

"'Late' Young!" exclaimed the visitor.

"Same's me," said the man on the bunk. "That is, what's left of me."

The girl had closed the door and stood by the table near her own bunk, which was partially concealed by a curtain strung on a wire.

"Heve something to eat, Boyer," said the old man, motioning to the girl. "Bird, there, my daughter, 'll fix you up."

The girl nodded and went about her task.

"What's hit you, Late?" asked Boyer, sitting down.

"Smashed my hip up on the lead and silver prospect I'm working. Guess I'm in for all Winter. Hurts too —— much to be moved. Where you headed for, Boyer?"

"Smith River," replied Boyer. He made a practise of keeping his business to himself. "Going through Hungry Horse Cañon at the upper end tonight. Seen any strangers lately?"

"Nary a stranger, Boyer. Who you after this time?"

Boyer merely smiled. He knew there was little information to be obtained there. For reasons of his own he did not propose to ask Young about his neighbor at the head of the valley. He changed the subject, talked of the rapid rise in the value of lead and silver ores and ate a hurried lunch prepared by the girl.

"Got enough supplies to last you all Winter?" he asked suddenly.

"Didn't have but —— little," chuckled the old man. "Was figuring on pulling out the very week I broke my hip. Fellow up the valley, Ross I think his name is, set my hip and lent me some grub. What's the idea? Going to hit the trail now? Better hang out here overnight; it's quite a piece to Smith River."

Boyer had risen and put on his heavy mackinaw and cap.

"Can't do it," he said quietly; "got to keep moving."

For an instant his gaze roved over the supply of provisions which was in the cabin.

"So long," he called as he left.

WITH long strides he soon covered the distance to the entrance to the gulch and turned up the trail which led along the base of the mountain toward the upper end of the valley.

For the balance of the afternoon he plodded tirelessly along the trail. The full glory of the Winter sunset of the altitudes shone in the high western skies when he reached the cleft where he had seen the second thin spiral of smoke. But it no longer looked like a cleft; it had widened and deepened with the lessening of distance and now proved to be a narrow cañon which cut through the summit of the northern ridge.

Hungry Horse Cañon it was called, although virtually it was a pass over the divide between Thimble Creek Valley and Smith River.

"It would be a mighty good place to hold up," Boyer thought to himself. "Escape open in two directions with the wind-blown ridges to fall back on in a pinch."

He proceeded into the shadows of the cañon and soon brought up at a small log cabin standing back a bit from the trail under a cliff. From its location a view could be had of the trail for a long distance in either direction. If it were occupied Boyer had been observed long since approaching, as he well knew.

Consequently he did not hesitate but walked directly to the door and thumped upon it.

For a long moment there was silence, then—

"Come in," was the invitation in a strong, masculine voice.

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Boyer lifted the latch and entered.

The man who confronted him was of medium height, fair-haired, blue-eyed and powerfully built. He wore a gun at his right hip, although his coat and hat were removed and his shirt was open at the throat. He obviously had been preparing supper.

It was the eyes which held Boyer's attention most. Bright, they were, and deep —deep with a glow in them, as are the eyes of all men who have lived in the open and who have been given to searching the distances. Intelligence was there, too, and something else that glinted in sinister flashes. They were the eyes of a man who was absolutely fearless, who would brook no interference, who would shoot to kill upon sufficient provocation.

Boyer knew from the description he had received from Rieubalt, from the man's eyes and from some subtle telepathy that radiated from him, that he stood face to face with Big Nose Charley, but he did not betray his knowledge.

The man was first to speak.

"Late in the season to be hitting the trail, ain't it?"

He spoke genially, with just a suggestion of banter, but his eyes did not waver.

"Not for me," answered Boyer heartily. "I often have to hit over this way into Smith River. Got some claims over there."

There was the element of truth to this, as Boyer had claims everywhere.

"And I don't mind a heavy trail," Boyer added. "Any chance to bunk here tonight?"

"Sure," was the quick reply. "Chance to eat, too. Put your stuff on that bunk over there." He indicated one of the two bunks on either side of the room.

While Boyer removed his snow-shoes from his back and stood them against the bunk, took off his belt, gun and mackinaw, he shot an occasional glance at the other man, who was putting the supper on the table—and each of these glances met the other's eyes.

Big Nose Charley did not know him, Boyer reasoned, but he knew, too, that this man would not take chances with any man, whether he knew him or not. He was also mindful of the fact that, as they sat down to supper, the other did not remove the gun which hung snugly against his right hip.

Boyer wore a loose mackinaw shirt, open at the throat and waist, over his other shirt. Under his left arm, beneath the mackinaw shirt, hung a holster containing a second gun. Thus, while he had ostensibly removed his weapon with his coat, he was still armed. During long hours he had practised the trick of getting that gun out from under his shirt. This trick had saved his life on more than one occasion.

The two men, sitting opposite each other, ate the johnny-cake and beans and drank their coffee in comparative silence. Never prolix, Boyer now confined his comments to the weather and mining conditions.

It was dark when supper was finished. Boyer's host lit three candles and set them upon the table. Then he washed the dishes, seeming to pay no attention to his visitor, although the latter knew he was watched every minute.

In turn Boyer reflected that he had no evidence against his quarry, except——

Yes, he had some evidence.

And, so far as he knew, Big Nose Charley had committed no other depredations within the States.

The other man turned from his menial task.

"Ever play checkers?" he asked casually.

Boyer thrilled. The query completed the link of positive identification. Rieubalt had said that the man was a checker fiend.

"I can play at it," said Boyer.

The other brought a board and men and placed them upon the table, and the two pulled up their chairs.

Boyer lost the first two games in short order.

"Guess you're a little out of practise," observed his opponent, "or maybe you was underestimating yore man."

Boyer caught an inflection in the man's speech which made him shoot a quick glance at him. He suspected a double meaning in the remark.

As a matter of fact, Boyer was a good checker-player. He had had much experience during loafing spells in the sheriff's office at Judith. He had been doing more thinking than playing in the two games. In spite of himself his opponent's remark nettled him.

He had opened the first game and now it was again his turn to move first. He opened a side game this time, instead of through the center as both other games had started.

He played carefully and he noted with some satisfaction a look of approval on the face of the man across the table.

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It was a long game and it ended in a tie.

Boyer's opponent leaned back in his chair and smiled. Then he made a motion below the edge of the table. A drawer scraped.

"Just going to get some new candles," said the man quickly and almost instantly laid them upon the table.

But, in the second that their eyes had met, Boyer realized that the other knew him.

The situation now was fraught with divers possibilities. Both men were keenly alert as they moved the checkers back and forth upon the board. There was a pregnant silence. Each, however, played his best, and the fourth game resulted in another draw.

Again the man leaned back in his chair, but this time he merely looked at Boyer. For some time he sat thus, and then spoke.

"YOU came a long way afoot, Boyer."

He spoke quietly—almost whimsically.

"Yes, Charley," Boyer answered, his eyes looking into the other's.

"For me?"

Big Nose Charley appeared but mildly curious.

"There's no use beating about the bush," said Boyer steadily.

"What do you want me for?"

"The hold-ups near the sapphire mines."

Charley elevated his eyebrows a trifle.

"More than one?" he asked.

"Two the same day, as you know," said Boyer.

"What was the count?" asked the other.

"Ten thousand in cash and the grub— he grub doesn't count for much," answered Boyer.

For long moments there was silence while the two looked at each other, their gazes never wavering.

"Let's play another game," suggested Big Nose Charley, shuffling the checkers.

They played as before—in silence.

But in one way this game was different from the others. Each man played only with his left hand.

"Who told you I was in this country?" asked Charley suddenly.

"A gambler at Judith."

The outlaw's eyes flamed and then glowed darkly.

"Rieubalt?" he snapped.

"Yes," said Boyer.

"Jump," sneered the other, pointing at the board.

Boyer jumped the checker indicated and found that he had unwittingly stepped into a trap, for the bandit gave him another man and then took three.

"You overlooked that one because you were watching my little operations down in this left-hand corner," smiled Charley. "It's that way sometimes. A man will direct attention to another thing or another man so that another thing or another man will be overlooked. It's something like—what you call it?—passing the buck?"

Again Boyer sensed a hidden meaning to the man's speech.

Almost immediately the bandit made a bad move and the handicap of a man short was removed from Boyer's game. A few more moves and the outlaw found himself cornered in his opponent's king row.

"That's the way it goes," he observed. "Now I'll have to come over on this side and start all over. Maybe I'll do better in a new game. It's that way sometimes." He met Boyer's look squarely. "Sometimes a man has to go over on another side and start all over—a new game."

Boyer caught the implication instantly.

"Have you done that, Charley?" he asked quickly.

The bandit was arranging his checkers.

"Maybe," he said shortly, "maybe not. But two of the same kind can't live in the same country if one of them starts a new game and starts it square."

"Meaning——?"

"Exactly," Big Nose Charley interrupted.

The board now was prepared for a new game. The bandit held out his left hand.

"Before I move I've got a proposition to make, Boyer. You're a mighty fast man on the draw and I'm tolerably fast myself. Maybe you've heard?" He grinned. "I know you've got another gun on you—probably under that jumper you're sportin'. You wouldn't be fool enough not to have it."

He read the truth of his surmise in Boyer's eyes.

"I knew you had it," he continued. "I know you've got it, but I don't believe you can get it out as fast as I can get this old cannon of mine into action. If it was to come down to cases I'd bet I've just the same as got the drop on you right now!"

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Boyer made no comment.

Big Nose Charley leaned over the table.

"Tell you what I'll do: I'll put this gun of mine on the table here and you toss yours on the bunk, and whoever wins this game takes my gun."

"And then?"

"Then it's up to him."

Boyer was thoughtful. There had been a lot of truth in what Charley had said. Perhaps the other did, virtually, have the drop on him. Would the bandit grab the gun from the table if Boyer tossed his on the bunk? The whole thing was a sporting proposition. Big Nose Charley had a reputation for liking sporting propositions. Perhaps that was why he had made the proposal. If he had wanted to kill Boyer he had had ample opportunity to attempt it—possibly to do it.

"I'll go you," decided Boyer.

In a flash the bandit's gun was on the table. Boyer was nothing short of amazed at the rapidity of the draw. Charley removed his hand as evidence of good faith. Boyer tossed his gun to the bunk.

"If anything is going to happen it should happen now," he thought as he watched the other.

Big Nose Charley made the first move of the new game.

It was a long game. New candles had to be lighted. The men thought for long periods between moves. Neither seemed to pay any attention to the gun which laid on that table within easy reach.

Finally Boyer won.

No sooner had he made the move which compelled an exchange, leaving the bandit with one king to his two, than Boyer grasped the gun.

"You'll have to consider yourself my prisoner, Charley," he said, almost with a note of apology.

"I see; the sapphire mine hold-ups, eh?"

"You've guessed it. What did you do with the money?"

Big Nose Charley leaned back and yawned.

"That's the funny part of it," he grinned. "I didn't get any money."

"What's the use of saying that?" demanded Boyer angrily. "I've got you dead to rights. Why not come clean?"

"Take a look around. Maybe you'll find it," invited the other. "I'm going to get some breakfast, if you don't mind."

Boyer took him at his word and, after securing the other guns, searched the cabin thoroughly while the bandit was getting breakfast. But he found no trace of the money.

"The thing that I don't understand," said Boyer while they were eating, "is how you pulled this thing off without leaving any tracks. Did you stay in the road all the time? How'd you get the stuff up here?"

"Packed it up in relays from a well-beaten path just as you round the turn into the mines—know where?"

"Just about," replied Boyer, "but after the first hold-up how did you catch up with the stage without leaving a short-cut trail over the hill?"

Charley appeared thoughtful.

"You say there were no tracks in the snow in the vicinity of the first hold-up?"

Boyer nodded.

"I don't know a —— thing about it!" snapped the other.

Boyer smiled.

"Oh, you'll tell all about it soon enough. We'll start for Judith now."

DAWN was blushing above the eastern peaks when they left the cabin.

"You're sure you want to leave that money here?" asked Boyer as they departed.

"If it's here, here it'll stay," grinned Charley.

"All right; keep ahead of me. I don't mind telling you that if you cut up any, or if it looks as if you were going to try it, I'll bore you."

Boyer was mad.

They kept a good pace down the trail to where it crossed the divide at the southern end and swung down into the valley in which lay the road leading to the sapphire mines. They followed the tracks made by Charley after the hold-up, as Boyer had come another way.

They rested atop the divide and in late afternoon made the mines road.

"Tell me when you come to the place where you think the first hold-up took place," called Big Nose Charley over his shoulder.

"You know it well enough," replied Boyer, "it's right around this bend."

When they had rounded the bend Big Nose Charley stopped, elevating his hands.

"Do you mind if we stop here a bit?" he asked. "Maybe I can show you something."

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"The money?" Boyer suggested.

"Or the trail to it, perhaps," said Charley. "You were figuring on waiting for the stage here and going into the mines for tonight anyhow, wasn't you?"

"Go ahead; what is it?" countered Boyer.

Big Nose Charley looked up the low bluff which caused the bend.

"Come up here with me," he said and started up the bluff.

Boyer followed.

When they were nearly up, Charley turned.

"You're sure the first hold-up occurred at this very spot?"

"Yes," snapped Boyer. "The driver himself showed me. What are you getting at?"

The bandit did not answer but walked out upon the bluff and pointed down at the snow on its top.

"It hasn't snowed and there has been little wind since the hold-up," he said earnestly. "Look there!"

Boyer looked and saw two narrow furrows in the snow, close together. They came from a point higher up behind the bluff and ended at its edge.

"Well, what about it?" he asked, puzzled.

"Nothing yet," said the other. "Let's take a look down below."

They tramped around the bluff back to the road and down the road a way to where there was a steep bank below it. Boyer kept his gun on his companion while the man stared down the steep bank.

Finally Big Nose Charley led the way down the bank to a point many yards below and again pointed into the snow.

Here the snow was tossed in two deep furrows that gradually grew more shallow as they followed down-hill, and finally became uniform.

"Well, what of it?" demanded Boyer impatiently.

"I'm showing you how the man who first held up the stage got into the road and out of it without leaving any tracks," said Big Nose Charley.

"What's that?" exclaimed Boyer.

"The man who pulled that robbery jumped from that bluff up there to the road, turned the trick and then on skis jumped from the road with a flying start to 'way down here!"

"Skis!"

"Sure! You don't know much about 'em here in Montana and there probably ain't a man in these hills as can use 'em, but in eastern Canada, around Montreal for instance, they use 'em a lot and understand 'em pretty well. You can jump a long way on 'em."

Boyer was dumfounded and forgot his gun as he gazed at the narrow, shallow furrows in the snow.

"You mean to say—on the level— Charley, that you didn't pull this robbery? That it was the work of another man on skis?

"Exactly! That's what I mean."

"But the provisions—I know you got the grub and then tried to brain the driver by throwing that loaded salt-sack or whatever it was at his head. He's got it in his wagon box—he told me——"

Big Nose Charley laughed loudly.

"So that's it, eh? Sure I took the grub; had to have it; didn't want to come into town, as I knew a certain party had been talking about me, so I grabbed it off the stage, but I didn't know a thing about the first hold-up then. I just reasoned this all out—and that sack I threw at the driver was loaded with gold dust."

Boyer looked from the ski-tracks to Charley's face and back again.

"Oh, you don't have to take my word for it," continued the other. "You say the driver still has the sack—look in it! You'll see some of the prettiest dust you ever laid eyes on."

"Where'd you get it," asked Boyer skeptically.

"Washed it out of Thimble Creek. That's what I'm doing up there, although I wanted to keep it quiet. That's one creek the Chinamen missed when they went through this country for the leavings."

Boyer was looking somewhat absently at a spot on Big Nose Charley's mitten—the one with which he had pointed.

"Nice bit of darning, that," he commented.

"Yes, I tore that mitten when I was packing the grub up to——"

Big Nose Charley paused.

"Up to Late Young's" supplied Boyer. "I saw the grub there. You've treated the Young's pretty white Charley. And the girl darned your mitten?"

"None of yore business!" snapped the other as his face flushed.

Boyer nodded with approval.

"Of course not," he agreed, grinning. "Certainly not. But who do you think

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was on the skis that made these tracks?"

"Well, as I was saying, skis is used a lot about Montreal and I know a party who used to hang out there who has turned a trick or two in the past like this and——"

"Is that what you meant when you said two men of the same kind couldn't live in the same country if one of 'em starts a new game and starts it square?" interrupted Boyer.

"That's what I was aiming to convey."

"And you're going to play the new game on the square?"

Boyer was looking at the mending in Big Nose Charley's mitten.

"I reckon I am."

Boyer put up his gun and stuck out his hand.

"So long. Come and see me when you come to town," he said, smiling.

"But ain't you going to wait for the stage and take a look at the gold in that little sack?" asked Big Nose Charley.

"No. I'm going to follow this track tonight. I ought to bring up at the Mint saloon in Judith about daybreak. I've got business with Rieubalt from Montreal."

As the other man strode along the trail he fingered a rough spot in his mitten and sang.

THE SPELL

by

Charles Beadle

Author of "Witch-Doctors," "The Alabaster Goddess," etc.

HE SAT up on his cot, put the muzzle of his service rifle in his mouth, inserted his bare toe and pressed the trigger.

We heard the report and that was the story we got on fatigue, scuffling the weeds on the parade-ground. A corporal's file was marched off to clear up the mess. But why? Why had he done it? The question gathered us in a bunch that absorbed even the non-com in charge.

It seemed incredible. Corporal "Nobby" Norton above all men— Nobby the cheerful, Nobby the hard case, Nobby the soak, for he could drink any of us under the table. Naturally we all wished to question Corporal Jock, his pal and *kier* mate, but it was Corporal Jock who had brought the news, his Scotch-blue eyes hard and staring, and who had fallen in the fatigue party.

"He must have been drunk," said tall MacLeod, leaning on his shovel and stroking his long mustaches.

"Drunk, ——!" said Pete Wilson, his pal, still longer and slimmer. "We ain't had breakfast yet an' he warn't no pillow soak."

A pillow soak keeps a bottle under his pillow to drink alone.

"Blimey!" ejaculated 'Piesty' Williams with much feeling. "'E mus' 'a' been balmy! Shot hisself! Whaffor?"

"Strike me pink!" exclaimed another cockney. "I dunno! Praps 'e wus spoony!"

"On a Mashona kid?" suggested young Carson. "Nobby was more in love with Bacchus than Venus!"

"Oo's 'e, smarty?" demanded little Bill.

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"Oh, both friends of mine," snickered Carson.

"'Ere," said little Bill pugnaciously, "if yer want a cosh on yer boko——"

"Aw, cut it out," drawled "Yank" Mason. "What do you think, Mac? Nobby was a white man. Yeaus, he sure was!"

"Can't comprehend yet," said Mac, wagging his long head. "—— if I can.

"Devilish hard luck, I say!" commented the melancholy Baron Huyker, despondently tracing a pattern in the sandy soil with his shovel. "Poor old Nobby! By ——, I am the most awfully sorry!"

"Me an' all!" added a trooper from the north of England. "Yon lad wuz the prince o' the field, he wuz that!"

"Me think he wass what you call crazy, *sí?*" suggested trooper Manzini. "But Nobbi wass my very goot frient alvays. *Sí! Sí!*"

"Come on, you fellows," came Corporal Donoghue's voice interrupting the requiem, "scratch around even if you can't work!"

Perfunctorily the group scattered and began to tickle the soil according to their various energies or lack thereof.

"What was wrong, Donoghue?" persisted Mac after three strokes, leaning upon his shovel to replug his pipe.

"How the devil should I know?" said the corporal gloomily, regarding young Carson patting sandy soil into tiny heaps.

"Jack ses he was spittin' blood for the last month, but he was no lunger. Look at the body of him!"

"But he never had a cough," said Mac. "Besides this isn't a tubercular country. Did you see him?"

The corporal nodded.

"Mess. All over the ceilin', begad! Devil a note nor nothin'." Pulling a watch from his tunic, he peered at it morosely and added: "'Bout twenty minutes. Might as well go. Dismiss, you fellers!"

The orderly-room bugle broke up the impromptu coroner's inquest and we fell in to receive orders. Afterward, except for Piesty and Manzini, who were detailed for a morning patrol across the *spruit* to the store and back, we were free until fatigue duty in the afternoon.

Yank Mason, my *kier* mate, and I returned to our hut, which was the only one left made of grass, wattle and daub behind the new camp, two lines forming a square with the oblong orderly room at the top and the quartermaster's store at the bottom, each and every one a miniature fort built with our hands of blasted rock and *darga*—mud and clay—while the gentle Mashona stood by to admire the dignity of labor.

Inyanga Fort was one of the healthiest stations in the Salisbury Division, if not in the whole of the Rhodesias, even though the cold mist that rolled down from the peaks every morning made Yank and me glad of the sweaters under our tunics.

Yank and I discussed anew the details as we had heard them, and there followed a debate which excited him, to my delight, into a series of yarns of Virginia which, from his enthusiastic account, appeared a glorious land of hold-ups, lynchings and scraps with revenue officers. These, muddled with stories of Custer and the Indians, made us blush for our weedy Mashona's prowess in murder and sudden death. Yank was a good story-teller and told stories, the veracity of which was considerably supported by a certain dexterity with a six-shooter; even skeptics were impressed by his favorite recreation of galloping into a *kraal* and shooting off the heads of chickens. And, in his cups, his absorbing idea was apparently to turn peaceful Mashonaland into a replica of his beloved Virginia.

Just as Yank, feeling possibly that he had to justify his seniority, had decided that just common booze, the special representative of the devil and Yank's own particular friend, was the motive of Nobby's act of self-destruction, a new light appeared on the subject in the person of our joint "boy," bearing the lunch of sweet potatoes and corned beef, who announced in his kitchen Kafir that Nobby's boy had disappeared.

To me the flight suggested something to do with the suicide, but Yank scoffed at the idea, pointing out that boys were likely to bolt at any time the idea struck them and, moreover, that, to the native mind, the death of a white man was likely to be blamed upon the nearest native for having cast an evil eye upon him, so that the only safe action was instant flight. That I knew was true, a fact which was corroborated immediately by the further statement of the boy Jim that the dead corporal's boy had been bewitched by a local witch-doctor.

"Rot!" said I promptly.

"Sure, kid?" asked Yank, stroking his

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long yellow mustaches. "Mebbe Nobby was bewitched."

I protested, pointing out that to expect native sorcery to work against a white man was absurd. Against their own people possibly it was effective, because they believed in those superstitions and magic powers. Besides, what on earth should the witch-doctor have done it for? Nobby hadn't long been in D Troop and hadn't arrested or interfered with any of the natives in our district.

"Yeaus," drawled Yank, "mebbe you're right an' mebbe you ain't. I dunno." Then with a glance at Jim, the boy, he went on, "But again mebbe Jim Crow here knows more'n any of us is likely to know, Faxen."

The boy's remark was decidedly a hint, but neither of us nor any of the others knew enough to follow it up. We did question him, but hot irons wouldn't have made him talk, even had he known any details. No explanation, either, was discovered among the effects of the suicide, not even, as the most romantic had supposed, a melodramatic letter from some girl from Heaven knows where, since Nobby had been more than ten years in the police and had spent his leaves in Buluwayo or Salisbury, neither of which towns in those days was a likely ground for romance except at the current price.

Booze and malaria was the consensus of opinion; a partnership responsible for the majority of demises in Africa. Yet there always lingered a queer doubt. Old Nobby had been such a hard case that one felt that neither the one nor the other of that undertaking firm would ever have numbered him, at least for a good many years, for even in his cups he was so darned quiet and sane that the theory that his rumsoaked brain had softened sufficiently to force him to self-destruction seemed untenable. I don't mean that a suicide was surpassingly strange. The only wonder was that there were not far more. If Piesty had shot himself—well, no one would have been surprized; and to tell the honest truth most of us would have been relieved and rather amused. But that Nobby should do so was somehow unconvincing.

Well, Nobby was buried with the usual military honors up on the stony hillside above the fort in a grave dug by the same fatigue party.

II

REVEILLE, stables, fatigue; fatigue, stables and lights out trudged along drearily, punctuated by main guard, stable guard, grazing guard and a few small uninteresting patrols. The rains came along and drove us for stables into the long wattle-and-daub shed, killed fatigue duty and set us to crouching over interminable *vingt-et-un* during the day, to be resumed in Wilkie's store across the *spruit* o' nights, where Yank, who invariably won, flushed the crowd and Donoghue grinned and pocketed chits.

Wild Saturday nights followed pay-day. After settling for the month's tick, the dice would rattle once more; later Mac, trying to stand upon the tips of his fingers on the table, would insist upon singing "The Lost Chord" at which many wept bitterly. Hiccuping sentimentally, Mac would call upon Young Faxey—that's me—to yell "Paintin' 'Em All Alike;" Sergeant Murray, he of the sugary tenor, medical sergeant on the strength of some years as a druggist's assistant, would wail "Annie Laurie" followed by Corporal Jock, late of the Scotch, who would chant "On the Bonny Bonny Banks o' Loccccch Lo-mond!"

Then Mac, swaying most aristocratically with half-shut eyes of ecstasy, would warble "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," which Yank, possibly enraged by Scotch spirits as well as sentiments, would immediately construe as a deadly insult, spring upon the counter, draw and hold up the bar in true Western style. The first time this occurred the effect was dramatic, but I unconsciously spoiled it by remarking innocently—

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't do that, Yank; it makes me nervous."

There was a shout of laughter even from the scared red-haired little Wilkie, the store man, who stood behind the bar with his hands in the air.

"Suttinly not, Algernon," drawled Yank, gazing at me sleepily.

He handed me the guns and consented to have a drink with Mac. Whereupon Jock, attempting to sing again, collapsed and had to be carried back to the camp.

Eventually this scene degenerated into a ritual. Mac, Sergeant Murray and Jock would always insist upon singing, then Yank would tickle his vanity by holding up the

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bar. The second time it occurred, they were held for some minutes before it dawned upon me to repeat my bored request, whereupon Yank replied as before, "Suttinly, Algernon!" and gave me the guns. After that Jock would sing and collapse; Nosey Parker, his pal, would thereupon offer to fight any one who might wish to interfere with his friend's unconscious body; Mac with the dignity of a ducal host would take Pete's arm, when he had succeeded in locating it, and sway gracefully down the hill to the small bridge across the *spruit* where, terrified by an attack of vertigo at the tremendous height of four feet above the water, they would kneel very carefully and proceed to crawl across, crying encouragingly to each other at intervals.

Not very long afterward the dull routine of station life was broken by an outbreak of smallpox among the natives. Temporary out-stations were to be formed along the Portuguese border to enforce the disinfection of people coming into Rhodesia—somewhat of a farce, as each camp was upon the recognized trails and anywhere from twenty to fifty miles apart.

Anyhow there was great competition to get appointed for these special patrols and by a streak of luck and my reputation for sobriety—Mac and Pete and two others had insured for me a bitter distaste for whisky for the remainder of my life by sitting on my chest and nearly drowning me by forcing a bottle of the beastly stuff between my teeth—I was detailed for one. My mates were Carson and the "Dutch Baron" in charge, together with twenty of the black watch, as the native police are termed, and one, Sergeant Mfumbwi.

We had to follow the Inyangombi stream until it broadened out and eventually met the Ruania River almost on the border where, at the junction, we made a temporary camp. The freedom from routine and the change of district, for the valley here is subtropical, pleased us much. Added to this was what we considered a devil of a joke—the holding-up of the natives coming through and forcing them to submerge in a barrel of Condy's fluid.

Well, the smallpox scare lasted for some months longer than was expected, and when at length the compulsory disinfection was removed, the tin gods down at Salisbury decided to establish an out-station there. So, on the banks of the palm-girt Ruania, we built huts with open walls made of stout branches set wide apart to gather whatever breeze was stirring in the heat. Around that district, too, was plenty of game—birds and buck and, for sport, lions and leopards.

As the camp was officially permanent the black watch were permitted to bring up all their wives and house them in their own quarters, as at headquarters stations, a wise dispensation which tends to diminish friction between them and the local natives. Being now our own bosses, we whites had practically nothing to do save make patrols, which, of course, were hunting-trips, once a month, and fish, loaf or shoot during the rest of the time.

Thus it was that when the rains came and one could scarcely move from shelter the Baron and I took it into our heads to study the local lingo. Sergeant Mfumbwi was our chief instructor and through him we began to gather a hazy idea of the extraordinary world in which the native lives, a world of spirits and magic which began to have an eery influence on us and raised a weak suspicion that we white men perhaps did not know such a —— of a lot after all. One result was that, when either of us was playing at being a little Solomon, sitting in judgment upon some petty native affair, we were not quite so ready to laugh at some plaintiff's statement that an enemy had bewitched his wife or his child.

However, although our cocksureness dwindled somewhat, we were not prepared to surrender the superiority of the white by even entertaining a possibility of truth in the remark made one day of my own boy Jim when talking about witchcraft. He declared that the corporal *Mlungu* at Inyanga fort, Nobby, had been bewitched into shooting himself. At that, we did indulge in a contemptuous laugh and in quite a supercilious manner pointed out that the charms of the white man were stronger than any native magic could be, though we recalled that previously he had said that Nobby's boy was bewitched. I asked him how he knew, but he merely replied that it was so and sought to please the wounded vanity of his masters by relating some other tale more palatable to their mad tastes.

The short rainy spell passed, the brief heat sizzled and then came the long rainy season. Carson was relieved, on account of malaria, by another man who brought

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news that there was talk of abandoning the Urania station, an event which disturbed us much, for neither the Baron nor I had any urge to return to the haughty tasks of scuffling a parade-ground or grooming horses.

About a month later, when returning from a shooting-trip which was duly reported in the monthly returns as a patrol, I saw that a caravan had just come in from the Portuguese side and, as usual, was camping on the allotted ground below the camp and down-river. Such was a very ordinary event, yet it never failed to give some slight thrill of interest not comparable to the arrival of the mail-runner or a new lion's spoor, but enough to be grateful for in the tropic wilderness.

As I marched across our own little clearing around the white camp, I caught sight of my boy Jim talking to another native whose black face seemed familiar. As I approached them, trying to recollect whose boy he was—his dress distinguished him as a native who had lived long in contact with white men—so that I might know what white men had come in, he turned, saw me and took to his heels.

Wondering, I advanced and asked Jim who he was and why he had bolted. Jim's blubber lips pouted sullenly. I repeated the question sharply and he replied sulkily to the effect that the man had been Nobby's boy, the one who had fled after the suicide. I tried to get out of the boy why the fellow had run away, but the ebon mask of the native who is asked something that he may not—because of tabu—or dares not tell, came over his face.

I decided to leave him alone for the present and entered my hut calling for him to pull off my field-boots preparatory to going down to the pool to invite malaria by having a dip. But, as I pulled on my slacks, a hubbub arose from the black watch quarters. I walked over and found the women clamoring and wailing and a black corporal ordering them into their huts.

On demanding to know the trouble, I was told that Sergeant Mfumbwi had deserted from the police. By grace of my improved knowledge of the native tongue I told the man what sort of a specialized fool he was; that Mfumbwi man had probably gone into the bush; and other fatuous surmises which were promptly quashed by the information concerning an act which a native soldier performs only when he really intends to desert. Sergeant Mfumbwi had left his uniform, rifle and equipment, as well as his three wives.

III

THE news excited me so much that I lost my head; that is, I attempted then and there to discover what had caused him to desert. Of course I got no information at all. I returned to our camp and went to the Baron, who was lying in his bunk reading, and reported, for, as senior trooper in charge, it was for him to say what was to be done. Not until we had been discussing the case for some time and had arrived at a decision that it was practically hopeless to send out a patrol of black watch after him, as his own people, even if they caught up with him, would never give him up, did I recollect the curious flight of Nobby's old boy at the sight of me.

"Oh, rot, Faxen!" said Huyker. "Just a coincidence."

"Funny coincidence," I retorted.

"Mebbe. What's it matter? Let the fool go and shove him in the monthly. Anyway he's lost his month's pay and his deferred pay, as well as losing his wives."

"That's just it," I persisted. "A man never does that unless he's done something."

"Probably has. Find out later," retorted the Baron lazily. "Come on, let's have scoff."

So we went in to scoff. We fed well on the Urania—fresh fish, fresh buck and birds and even palm-wine—and traded our canned rations. Later in the evening I tried to talk to my boy Jim alone in my *kier*, but, although he had been quite communicative for a native, since I had been able to speak a bit, he shut up like a clam, which made me more certain than ever that there was some connection between the flight of Nobby's old servant and the desertion of Sergeant Mfumbwi.

The next day we had to arrange the disposal of that gentleman's wives. However, as all three were fairly young and powerful, his comrades offered to take them over, mighty glad, as a matter of fact, to get such a valuable thing as a wife for nothing.

As the ladies consented in the native manner, we thought the matter settled.

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However, about a month later when the required time of tabu had elapsed, which custom decrees, before a discarded wife may become the property of the new owner, there arose once more a hubbub in the black watch quarters. The outcome was that one Private Singulabi was excessively indignant because the wife whom he had obtained for nothing, although that did not influence the native mind, was mutilated and therefore he would not have her.

Well, that did not interest us whites much. We merely laughed to ourselves and gave him permission to divorce her, which meant that she would have to be sent with the next party to headquarters to let the skipper as magistrate deal with the case.

That evening my usual curiosity urged me into worrying Jim as to how she had become mutilated. The reaction to the question startled me. Jim's blubber lips quivered and the yellow of his eyes rolled with every symptom of terror. At length he said that he did not know, which was obviously a lie. Then I did a foolish and clumsy thing. I said that I knew all about it and that, unless he told me everything, I would have him *kiboko'd* on the morrow.

Well, in the morning I did not receive my usual cup of coffee and bawled myself hoarse yelling for Jim, who did not come. Swearing, I clambered from under my mosquito-net and went across to the cook-house, breathing vengeance. There I learned that Jim also had bolted.

This information made me forget my irritation. I commandeered some one else's coffee and went across to Huyker, who listened to my theories with scarcely concealed spleen. The latest flight was more than a coincidence, or so it seemed to me; and I wanted to get to the bottom of it. Probably because I was rather vain of my linguistic abilities and wished to exercise them, I discovered that the best method would be to ignore our own people and seek information from the local witch-doctor.

Now this was quite a reasonable, if not a brilliant, inspiration, although I did not realize that at the time. But it was too early in the morning for Huyker to appreciate my intelligence. He wasn't interested, he said. Jim was not his boy and, as for the rest, they were a —— nuisance anyway. I announced, however, that I was going to take the matter in hand and left him grumbling at the idiocy of kids just out from home.

The said witch-doctor was just the ordinary old scoundrel who plies his trade in nearly every village. Several times Sergeant Mfumbwi had brought him to visit us and, on being supplied with tobacco and possibly "a wee doch-an-doroch," he had recounted native legends, more or less true, for the amusement of the white chiefs. Now I argued, moved by a beginning of comprehension of the native mind, that, if anybody knows anything about this matter, this old villain does, or, if he does not, he will know how to get information—for a price.

During the superficial studies of the language it had dawned upon me that there was a whole world of action going on right beneath our eyes, of which we whites had not the slightest conception. Needless to say I came back from the village that afternoon with my tail between my legs. Never a more innocent creature existed on this planet. Of course I had approached him altogether in the wrong way, but, anyhow, my childish offers of reward eventually bore fruit.

TEN days later, when Huyker and the other men were away on a hunting-patrol trip and the camp happened to be more or less deserted, about two hours after sunset, I was reading by candlelight when there appeared a scraggy form at my hut door. In my mixture of Mashona, Sintabili and the local dialect we talked all night.

The first hour or two was spent in sheer fencing and subtle bargaining as to how much he was to get. When this lengthy business had been settled we began to approach the kernel of the matter. In short, my good friend the doctor understood what I wanted to know and I understood that, although he did not know the exact details, he did know that it had had something to do with the black lady who had been mutilated and, moreover, that he could—for a special price—make magic which would cause her to divulge the whole story.

Now I don't quite know whether in those days I had some superstitious faith in his magic or not, but I was confident that in some extraordinary way—trickery I thought sometimes and at others not—that the said magic was often efficacious. When terms had been agreed and an earnest received, the dawn was come and the old man silently departed. I didn't say a word of

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this matter to Huyker and the other man when they returned, for fear of being laughed at for having been tricked, and, as the days went by without any sign of communication from my wizard, I, too, began to think that I had been fooled.

More than a month later, when the lady in question had long departed for headquarters, the old sorcerer reappeared as he had done before. He began his tale by explaining that the expenses of capturing her soul by securing clippings of her hair on which to make magic and thereby obtain the power over her to make her confess, had been greater than estimated. When that little matter was amicably settled he related a long story which proved to his satisfaction the efficacy of his own black magic, which revealed these apparent facts:

Nobby Norton, some six months before his suicide, had one day been down by a large fig-tree between the white camp and the black watch quarters, where there was a grindstone standing in the shade. While sharpening a knife or some instrument he had heard a scream from the black watch camp, from which had emerged a woman running and pursued by Sergeant Mfumbwi. To his amazement she had cast herself at his feet and had exhibited the mutilations which her husband, the sergeant, had already inflicted upon her in a fury of jealousy.

Nobby had quite naturally flown into a rage of disgust at the inconceivable brutality of the jealous husband and had forthwith taken his *kiboko* and thrashed Sergeant Mfumbwi. Now Nobby had been a powerful man and had nearly killed the black sergeant, and knowing that he had no legal right to touch the man, but should have reported the case to his skipper as magistrate according to law, he had probably decided to conceal the crime, but had informed the woman that if ever her husband ill-treated her again she was to come straight to him and he would have him shot.

The thrashing and the threat appeared to have been effective, but Nobby, like most of the whites, had little knowledge of, and cared less for, native ways. The black sergeant might have taken the hiding from the white sergeant and have borne no malice, but his shame had taken place before his wife—a woman. Mfumbwi obviously dared not attack Nobby openly, but had appealed for justice—according to the native mind—to what he considered a higher power. He had consulted the local witch-doctor, who had agreed to make magic so that Nobby should surely die.

First of all the medicine-man had woven his spells around Nobby's servant and, when the boy was in his power, had caused him to bring the usual necessities—hair, etc.—to him on which to make magic; then, as an extra precaution, he had given the boy a magical substance to place in the white man's food—very finely chopped hair of the leopard, which produces on the lungs an effect similar to that of tuberculosis.

Then, apparently, he had attempted to force the same psychological reaction upon the white as witch-doctors do upon their brother natives—suggestion. He had caused Nobby to know that magic had been made against him and that he was doomed to die, as was proved by the manifestations of the constant spitting of blood.

What must have been the state of Nobby's mind one may never know exactly. That he drank was true. He had been years in the country, which might easily tend to make him superstitious to some degree, as most of us are. Men drink from some hidden cause; in the tropics boredom is frequently the cause; long residence and malaria wear down vital resistence physically and therefore psychically. Perhaps poor old Nobby would not have dared to tell fellow whites of his fears for fear of ridicule; perhaps in a deeper fit of the blues he had noticed that the mysterious disease—for he did not know the cause—was increasing, and he had never before had symptoms of lung trouble, a fact which had confirmed or developed his faith in black magic, and he had chosen to take a quick way out.

That was why, of course, his servant, ground between terror of the witch-doctor and fear of the white man, had run away. That was why, more than a year afterward, he had fled at the sight of white men from the same camp who knew him; also why Sergeant Mfumbwi, terror-stricken possibly by the sudden advent of Nobby's servant, had deserted; why my boy, alarmed by my persistent questions, had bolted as well.

The fact which most alarmed me at the time, however, was that every single native in the camp at Inyanga must have known the whole time that the magician had bewitched the *mlungu* Nobby, whose suicide had probably made the reputation of the witch-doctor for fifty miles around.

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THE GATE THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN

A Four-Part Story Part II

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "When Kentucky Starved," "Gentlemen of the North," etc.

The first part of this story briefly retold in story form.

TWICE during that Summer day of 1867, Richens Lacy Wooton, commonly known as "Uncle Dick" Wooton, had opened his toll-gate to admit the passing of a stage-coach, and each time the passengers had excitedly informed the gate-keeper that they had been held up. Rumors were current that the road-agents had combined under the leadership of a mysterious bandit known as "Gentleman Ralph."

Among the agents identified by the driver of the first coach were the notorious "Boy Charlie" and "Chuckle-Luck." The passengers, despite the denials of "Turkey Bill," the driver, insisted also that a woman had been present at the hold-up. The driver of the other coach had been badly wounded, and Joe Peace, an unsuccessful prospector who had been asleep in the coach, had brought the second stage and wounded driver to Uncle Dick's house.

Uncle Dick Wooton, admitted to be second only to "Kit" Carson as a mountain man, had built a toll-road through Raton Pass when the immigration of settlers, gold-seekers and adventurers demanded a more direct route for wagons to southeast Colorado and northeast New Mexico than was afforded by the old Santa Fé Trail. From his lofty home at the toll-gate he overlooked the valley of the Purgatory River, and to the north he could see the white dome of Pike's Peak.

Shortly after the coaches had departed, two men afoot brought in a bruised, unconscious girl, and disappeared.

Slowly the girl's bruises mended, but she remained delirious, exclaiming from time to time:

"Skeletons! Dead men's bones! The river! The river!"

Further than this Uncle Dick and Joe Peace could not understand her.

Recovering from the shock, her memory partly returned, though she was yet unable to identify herself or tell whence she had come.

"'Alameda'—that's all I remember—and 'convent,'" she said.

Uncle Dick decided to name her "Mary June." She was, however, able to draw a sketch of a place which seemed to stand foremost in her memory. This sketch showed a narrow trail along the right bank of a river, and on the edge of the trail stood a stunted pine, twisted and distorted by the elements, behind which were several human skeletons.

Though Uncle Dick did not recognize the place, he believed it to be along the Purgatory River and decided to set out in quest of it. First, however, he told Joe Peace, who had fallen in love with Mary June, that he must keep his affection to himself until the girl had recovered her past. Also he set several friendly Arapaho Indians to guard the girl. These had heard of the woman who traveled with the road-agents, but refused to talk of her, believing her a medicine-woman.

Deciding first to visit Baptiste, a mixed-blood trader who was usually well informed concerning what was happening in that part of the country, Uncle Dick set out early the next morning. As he paused beside a small lake, a bullet whizzed by his head and plumped into the water before him.

From the shelter of the woods he saw ten horsemen round the turn behind him. He took a shot at the leader. The troop was thrown into confusion and Uncle Dick galloped off.

At Baptiste's trading-post he found that breed engaged in a duel with a newly established trader across the river, and, covering both with his revolvers, Uncle Dick halted the fight.

Here he found that the night before a wounded man had staggered to the trader's and there had died. The two were now quarreling over the contents of a bag suspended from the dead man's neck.

Determined to settle the argument, Uncle Dick went to the body and took the bag. The body he identified as that of Boy Charlie, but Baptiste refused to admit that he had known the road-agent. When the other two were not looking, Uncle Dick extracted from the bag a slip of paper on which was drawn the same sketch as that by Mary June, except that the skeletons were lacking and in their place was a small cross and beneath it the figures 56. Also he found in the bag a little gold-filled cross

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which, with the permission of the traders, he kept.

He could get no information from them, however, concerning the mysterious white woman. Keene, Baptiste's rival, he believed really knew nothing, and Keene, despairing of success as a trader, decided to join Joe Peace at the toll-house and try prospecting.

Continuing on his way, Uncle Dick met a band of Kiowas headed by Satanta, the most dreaded of the Kiowa chiefs. Realizing, however, that most Indians were friendly toward him and resolved to see what information he could get, Uncle Dick advanced boldly into the camp.

Satanta was friendly but suspicious, and Uncle Dick received no information concerning the road-agents or the mysterious woman.

That night, concealed near the Indian camp, he saw some twenty Dakotas ride up and hold conference with Satanta. He realized that trouble was coming and decided to drop his own quest in order to go for help to Colonel Leavenworth.

CHAPTER IV

GENTLEMAN RALPH PLAYS A CARD

THE attack in the darkness necessitated a change in Uncle Dick's plans. With the Kiowa warriors swarming to their badly choked brother and learning from him that a white man had been acting the spy, the mountaineer knew Satanta would exert every energy to overhaul him and still his tongue. Whereas he had intended to abandon the trip to the Purgatory and return with all haste to the toll-house and send a messenger to Colonel Leavenworth, he now found himself compelled to make for the river in order to escape the red pack. Satanta would assume that the quarry would make straight for Raton Pass and the chief, therefore, would endeavor to cut him off.

Believing this, Uncle Dick rode furiously toward the range, then turned at right angles and cut across the plains. The muffled hoofs of his mount saved him from betraying his position to his pursuers and, once on the prairie, he slowed down and cautiously began an encircling movement.

The stars and the fire from the camp gave him his direction. Occasionally faint yells from along the buttes reached his ears, but, so far as he could detect, no guards had been thrown out on the plains. When the east began to show color he felt he was safe from discovery unless Satanta should suspect his ruse and send men to the river. Within pistol-shot of the headwaters of the Purgatory he hobbled his horse and allowed the animal to graze, and himself spread a blanket, thinking to snatch a few hours of sleep.

He was a considerable distance above the cañon, through which the river tumbled for many miles. This isolation tended to eliminate any temptation to postpone sending a message to Colonel Leavenworth while he tarried to explore the cañon. No, he would rest a bit, not being so young as when he rode for nights and days and slept in the saddle, and then he would make for home and plan a return trip.

Before seeking rest, however, it was necessary to scout the immediate vicinity. This he did, not because he feared the presence of Indians, but to make sure no lawless whites were in the neighborhood. If any number of road-agents were working under one leader their logical retreat must be somewhere on the Purgatory. His knowledge of the terrain forced this conviction upon him. Striking from the river, the bandits had access to Trinidad, could raid the trail as far north as Hole in the Prairie, or dash down into northern New Mexico by way of Raton Pass.

As Uncle Dick stole from the pocket he pondered frowningly over the frequent use made of the toll-road by the robbers. So long as the hold-ups had been haphazard, the work of a few men working independently of each other, he had not felt called upon to function for the authorities or the Overland Company, but, if system were being applied to the nefarious work, the use of his road became a personal affront. For him to face a radical evil, one that did not wreck itself quickly, demanded an immediate quest for a preventive.

A cure, as he visioned it, could be simply and quickly applied. It would require a posse of fearless men stationed at the top of the pass under the leadership of some such resolute spirit as Joe Peace. With such a weapon law and order could sweep from its high perch and strike above or below the pass. By seizing all suspects arriving at the station, the strength of the gang would be whittled down. By breaking their short line of communication with New Mexico, the posse would soon break the spirit of the band. Extermination would follow, and the mountains would be cleansed.

Such a course would mean open war between him and the outlaws, but the prospect of violence never deterred Uncle Dick

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from taking a short-cut. On returning to the station he would forward a message to Leavenworth, arrange for the posse and then come back to the Purgatory on the girl's business.

"RED or white or the devil! Come and help me!" suddenly called a faint voice from behind a big boulder.

With the alertness of early manhood Uncle Dick dropped to one knee and cocked his rifle. Death-traps were often disguised under frantic appeals for aid.

"I heard you. I know you're there. Help, for the love of God!" gasped the voice.

"Toss your guns over the rock," commanded Uncle Dick.

There sounded a deep groan, and something clattered against the top of the boulder and fell back. The voice faintly confessed—

"Too weak—shot to pieces by Charlie, —— him!"

Convinced that some one was lying in the last extremity just beyond the boulder, yet unwilling to assume any unnecessary risk, Uncle Dick placed his hat on the end of his rifle and pushed it round the rock with his left hand, at the same time thrusting his head and a revolver round the other side. One glimpse of the man flat on his back, his face livid from sun and thirst, brought Uncle Dick to his feet. The heavy revolver the man had attempted to throw over the rock was mute evidence of the unfortunate's willingness to disarm himself.

Uncle Dick recovered his hat and ran to the river, the man calling out for him to come back and not to desert him. Filling the hat with water, the mountaineer hastened to the sufferer and permitted him to drink. The man swallowed with difficulty and greedily caught the rim of the hat in his teeth when Uncle Dick would have removed it. He seemed unable to get enough. Not until after the third trip did he give a sigh of content. His face was baked by the heat, and the red stains on his flannel shirt indicated the serious nature of his wounds. Procuring more water, Uncle Dick bathed the swollen visage and examined the wound. It required only a superficial investigation to tell him the man was at the opening of the Great Pass.

"You're a white man, pard," whispered the dying one. "I've got mine. I know I've got to cash in. Serves me right for yoking up with such cattle."

"You said Charlie did for you. Did you mean Boy Charlie?" murmured Uncle Dick.

"Boy Charlie—boy devil; curse him!" spat out the man, his cracked lips snarling. "Got me to come here. Promised me a quick fortune—then done for me."

"You're an agent?" queried Uncle Dick, gently bathing the caked blood from the wound.

"Have I got any chance?" countered the man.

"No chance," softly replied Uncle Dick, strangely feeling sorrow that the man must die, whereas a few minutes before he had planned a wholesale destruction of the gang. "Even if you had had help the first thing, there'd hardly been a chance for you. You're done for, my man."

"I've known it ever since I was plugged, yet I sort o' hoped I'd win through on account of Isobel. If I knew about the girl I'd feel easier."

"Whose girl?" asked Uncle Dick, his eyes filling with sympathy as he anticipated the answer.

"Mine, now her father's dead—my niece—best girl in the world. Stranger, ain't it —— for a man to have the chance to take care of a girl and then go wrong? I reckoned I could clean up a pile and leave her rich—that she'd never know. I saw only some easy gold in it—no bloodshed, just taking from them that had. Every one seemed to be doing it one way or t'other—Injuns taking everything they could lay paws on to—white men robbing the Injuns—every one holding up some one else. Didn't seem so worse with Boy Charlie and Chuckle-Luck telling it. Then there was the boss. He could talk a angel into using two guns."

"The boss? Ralph, eh? Who is he? Where is he?" cried Uncle Dick.

The man gave a ghastly smile and tried to shake his head.

"He's played square with me, far as I know. Doesn't even know I had the girl along."

"Isobel, you called her. Where is she?" demanded Uncle Dick, his curiosity concerning the bandit leader falling behind his desire to learn about the girl.

The man groaned and his face wrinkled in anguish.

"God help her! I don't know. That's what makes dying hard. It ain't what I must meet, but what I'm leaving behind that hurts. I never planned it this way. I'd

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planned to take her East and locate her. She was never to know. Then the boss sent word I was to help in one job to prove I was square and wouldn't blow when I struck Missouri. The boss didn't know I had her along. I made her believe the gang was traders, sticking together because they were scared of Injuns. I hid her up in a safe place and went through with the job—westbound stage."

He halted and coughed convulsively.

"And then?" prompted Uncle Dick, wiping the man's lips and bending lower.

"After the hold-up, Chuckle-Luck and Charlie told me she'd been thrown from her hoss and hurt—that they'd rushed her off where she could be took care of. I was crazy to follow her, but they wouldn't tell me where they took her. Said it would mean capture and death for me. Promised to take me to her in a day or so when it was safe. I rode alone back to the river where I'd left her and found the buckskin bag she carried her gold cross in. She'd picked up two nuggets, almost pure gold, and dropped them into the bag. I didn't have time to look for the spot where she'd found them, but I made a map. The place must be somewhere between the twisted pine and the hole under the cliff—fifty-six paces between the two. Like a fool I showed the nuggets to Chuckle-Luck and Charlie. They acted like madmen. I pretended I couldn't tell where I found the bag, but that I would know the spot if should I see it again."

He licked his dry lips and rolled his eyes toward the river. Uncle Dick brought water, and, after drinking, the dying man continued.

"She never guessed the truth. She believed they was traders hiding from the Injuns. How she ever come to quit the place and fall from her horse I don't know. After I'd told Chuckle-Luck and Charlie about the nuggets, I got afraid of the way they acted. They promised to fetch the girl to me if I wouldn't tell the rest of the gang about the nuggets. That was when we was alone together—right in this spot. I grew more scared account of the girl. They're bad—worse'n me.

"Chuckle-Luck talked with Charlie one side, then rode off, after saying he was going to fetch Isobel. Charlie then let on he could find the place without the girl. He planned to cover the ground she'd been over after she quit the hole in the cliff. I told him he couldn't do it, that even Isobel didn't know where she'd been. I wanted him to think that finding the place all depended on me and that I wouldn't tell anything if they tried anything crooked with me or the girl.

"Then he come out flat-footed and said Chuckle-Luck was up to mischief, that we was old friends and could play the game just by ourselves. He'd known me quite a spell, and I think he meant it when he said it. Then I made the mistake of striking hands on the bargain and, because I believed him, I showed him the map I'd hid in the pouch. If ever you see a tall man with a notched left ear, plug him on sight. He's a road-agent; kill him for that. He's a low-down cowardly scum and he dropped me without giving me a show. Kill him for that. I managed to fire once when he rode away but missed him."

"You didn't miss him. He's dead. I've just come from where he's buried on Muddy Crick—drilled from side to side," gravely corrected Uncle Dick.

The dying man heard this incredulously. Uncle Dick nodded emphatically.

"Dead? Charlie pegged out ahead of me? Dead by my lead?" choked the outlaw, trying to lift his head. "—— me, but that's rich! If it wa'n't for Isobel I'd die happy, but not knowing where she is——"

"She's all right. She was left with me," broke in Uncle Dick. "I'm Dick Wooton, keeper of the toll-gate in Raton Pass. She was left with me. I will take good care of her."

"Uncle Dick Wooton! They talk about you—Santa Fé," gasped the outlaw, feebly pressing the mountaineer's hand. "Everything seems to be about right."

An ashen pallor began showing about his lips. With the pleased, amazed expression frozen on his face, he stared up into Uncle Dick's pitying countenance.

Uncle Dick ran and brought water, but the outlaw could not swallow.

"The girl Isobel! What is her name—her real name? She is safe."

The road-agent rallied for a few moments.

"She shall never know this—my being a road-agent?" he whispered.

Uncle Dick in his mind pictured the girl riding out on Devil's Elbow, suddenly startled by the scene of the hold-up in the road below. He pictured her discovering the grim truth as she recognized some of the

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bandits, heretofore honest traders in her estimation. Possibly she had identified her uncle as one of the band. Then followed the mad gallop to get away from it all and her collapse in the road as she sought to get clear of the pass. Nevertheless he assured the dying man.

"She shall never know you were not honest traders. I will say you were killed by Indians—anything but the truth. Her name?"

"Why the name she give you, of course," painfully replied the outlaw, his eyes growing puzzled.

Uncle Dick hurriedly explained how the girl had lost her memory and could not identify herself, but when he had finished he saw the man had heard nothing.

In vain he endeavored to arouse him, but the stolid indifference of death was deadening the ears and stilling the tongue. Then, as the mountaineer gave up all hope, the set eyes lighted with intelligence, the lips sought to frame some speech, the gaze grew bright. Uncle Dick waited, but the flash of life was only the brilliance of delirium. The swollen lips were mumbling:

"No place for Isobel—dead men's bones. She mustn't see them. Fifty-six paces downstream from the pine. Just one or two good hauls, then for the East. Gentleman Ralph gives the order. All ready boys! Here comes the stage. Chuckle-Luck's to cover the driver. Charlie 'n' me 's to get the box. Hands up!"

Death sounded the rattle in the bronzed throat. The harsh lines in the livid face were smoothed out. The fixed eyes were staring into the blue sky, and "Isobel Some One's" wayward uncle had pulled off his last hold-up. With a sigh for the blasted life and his disappointed hopes, Uncle Dick closed the unseeing orbs, brought scraggly boughs, covered the body and built a cairn over it.

Withdrawing to the pocket in the rocks, Uncle Dick sat down on the blanket and took some food from his saddle-bag. Between mouthfuls he summed up.

"Missed on learning the one thing I wanted—her name. But that oughter be easily picked up in Santa Fé. Do I want to pick it up? She mustn't know the truth if her mem'ry fails to come back. Poor child! If she ever does remember, she'll know all. Till she does remember, she is to be the only survivor of a east-bound party attacked by Injuns. We'll let it go at that.

"Then there's the gold. The place is somewhere in the cañon—fifty-six paces beyond the pine as you go down-stream. That's hers by right of discovery. She shall have it. First name is Isobel, but, if she doesn't remember, she shall remain Mary. Better change it to Mary Wooton; then it'll seem like I had more of a claim on her."

He had finished eating and was contemplating the advisability of taking a nap, when he suddenly recalled the dead man's statement concerning Chuckle-Luck's departure to bring back the girl. Leaping to his feet, he threw the saddle on to his horse, mounted and galloped toward Raton Range.

"That scum ahead of me," he groaned, "and me mooning round and thinking of taking a snooze when I'd been told that cuss was gunning for the girl in hopes of learning her secret! Reckon I'm growing old, all right. Of course he'll try to steal her. Who the —— is their boss? They're organized, no mistake about that. Gentleman Ralph is the leader, but he wasn't with them when Turkey Bill's coach was held up. Wonder if any of them saw her on Devil's Elbow watching the performance? She must have seen her uncle. That was the shock that spoiled the girl's mem'ry and clogged her brain. Reckon that army surgeon savvied it right all the way through."

AS HE dismounted at the toll-gate and a Mexican raised it, the mountaineer hastened to the cook-house. Big Knife, the Arapaho Indian, was sprawled in the doorway enjoying a pipe. Uncle Dick sniffed at the blue smoke and identified the aroma as that of his private stock.

"Big Knife likes the white man's tobacco," grimly remarked Uncle Dick.

"Big Knife likes the white man's tobacco and the white man's guns," calmly responded the Indian.

"You have watched over the medicine-woman?"

"She has not moved from the house without an Arapaho at her heels."

"Has any stranger come while I've been away?"

"One white man in there." He nodded toward the station-house. "Big Knife does not like him."

"Why?"

Big Knife puffed his pipe in silence, his small eyes half-closed. Realizing he might

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question him indefinitely without attracting a particle of attention, Uncle Dick grunted in disgust and turned back to a window opening into the eating-room. A glance and a whimsical smile puckered his lips. Joe Peace and Sam Keene sat on the long settee with the girl between them, each striving to hold her attention. The fat face of the Quail showed at the door of the girl's room.

As Uncle Dick looked on, the squaw advanced a step into the room. The girl promptly rose, and, with a smile and a duck of her pretty head to the two men, ran to the Arapaho woman, who drew her into the room and closed the door. Without glancing at Keene, Peace rose and stalked to the fireplace, leaning his arm on the stone shelf.

Returning to the cook-house, Uncle Dick found the stub of a pencil and a sheet of paper. He scrawled a note to Colonel Leavenworth in which he expressed his fears regarding Satanta's sincerity in promising to sign a peace treaty on Medicine-Lodge Creek. He briefly detailed what had happened at the Kiowa camp and urged that pressure be brought to bear on Satanta. Addressing this, he returned to Big Knife and demanded—

"What Arapaho man here at the station is swift of foot?"

Big Knife removed his pipe and whistled shrilly. A slim young buck with an intelligent face came round the end of the cook-house, surreptitiously wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"—— ! They'll eat me clean off the mountain," growled Uncle Dick. Then he spoke in Arapaho: "You are Gray Wolf? You run like the wind?"

"I am Gray Wolf. I run when I am in a hurry. When I have plenty of time, my white father, I ride my pony."

"You will take this talking paper. It is for Colonel Leavenworth. You will take it to Fort Dodge unless you overtake soldiers riding east, then give it to them. The paper says it is from me. Any of Hancock's soldiers will send it on. If you overtake no soldiers riding to the fort, you will keep on and hand it to Major Douglas at Dodge. Take a good horse from the corral. When you come back I will have presents for you, but remember this talking paper must get through."

"Gray Wolf will ride the horse to death—then run. The talking paper shall go through," assured the young buck, taking the message and putting it in a pouch.

With this business off his mind, Uncle Dick turned to Big Knife and asked—

"You do not like the new white man?"

Speaking through his teeth and without bothering to remove the pipe, the Arapaho answered—

"The man Peace will kill him."

Only his eyes rolling toward the station suggested the need of interference on Uncle Dick's part.

Uncle Dick sprang to the rear door, and as his hand touched the latch-string, he heard Peace crying out:

"You're too —— willing to get acquainted. Can't you understand I don't like you? I don't like your face, your ways, or your gall in putting yourself ahead of the procession."

"I weep," replied a solemn voice.

"You'll do worse than that if you cross my trail again with any of your funny business," was the hot retort.

"I shiver."

In a burst of rage Peace hoarsely warned:

"See here, stranger, you've already blatted out that you're from the East. I take it you don't savvy our ways out here. We don't like to have men drop in on us and make themselves too much at home."

"Meaning this is your home, I reckon," drawled Keene.

"I'm not talking about your way of taking up living-quarters here. That's Uncle Dick's business to settle when he gets back. But you're too quick in getting acquainted with our women."

"Woman," gently corrected Keene. "I've paid no attention to the Indian lady."

"The young white woman who lives here," slowly amended Peace, his voice as sharp as a knife-blade. "It may be the proper thing back East, but it doesn't go here."

"Then a man from the East can't ever get acquainted with a woman out here?" remarked Keene.

"He can at least wait till we find out something about him," Peace sternly shot back.

"I don't see how you have anything to say so long as the young lady doesn't object," carelessly retorted Keene. "I've paid her no attention beyond common civilities."

"——your civilities! You offer them too freely. They're not wanted. This top of the pass ain't big enough for the two of us. Understand that? And I'm not reckoning on moving on. I got here first."

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Speaking slowly Keene replied:

"I fail to see as how it's any of your business if I talk to the young lady, so long as she doesn't kick. If you're her brother, or husband, or her husband-to-be, I'll listen to your yapping real polite-like, but so long as you ain't figgering in any of those capacities you can go to —— with your warnings and fault-finding."

UNCLE DICK heard the settee scrape back and he opened the door just as Peace, snarling in anger, leaped toward Keene, a long knife flashing from his boot-leg. With a quick sweep of his long arm Keene brought the settee between them, thus gaining a second of time—enough to reach his knife in the belt he had hung on the wall. Before the blades could clash Uncle Dick was inside the door commanding:

"Put them knives up! The last man to obey never enters this station again."

The two weapons disappeared like magic. Peace turned back to the fireplace, his handsome face convulsed with shame and rage. Keene looked at him vacuously, then faced Uncle Dick, his eyes glistening with pleasure.

"Welcome to your home, and I'm sure mighty glad to see you," he greeted.

"What the —— does this knife-play mean?" sternly demanded Uncle Dick, striding between the two and glancing balefully from one to the other.

"Mr. Peace 'lowed I hadn't any call to talk with Miss Mary," Keene answered.

"He makes himself too promiscuous, Uncle Dick," growled Peace. "The girl can't move but what he's at her heels."

"She had to say only a word to send me about my business," protested Keene.

"She isn't to be put to that bother," warned Uncle Dick, beginning to understand Big Knife's reason for disliking the newcomer. "I said if you came here I'd buy your junk for my Arapahoes. I didn't expect that at the first shot out of the gun you'd act as if you'd always lived here."

Somewhat abashed, Keene tried to defend himself.

"I didn't mean any harm. Peace talked to her, and I didn't see why I couldn't, if she didn't mind. For a derned long time I've been where I couldn't speak to a white woman. Maybe I was too hungry to talk to her, but she didn't seem to lay it up against me."

"Sit down," said Uncle Dick, now speaking softly, his ire vanishing. "Joe, you come over here. No use to let the girl know what we're bleating about. Now both of you listen. Miss Mary's my daughter. Any man caught trying to make up to her, unless she comes to me and says she wants him to, is going to git heavily freighted with lead.

"Joe, I've known you for quite a few months and you're always welcome, but no love-making just yet. Keene, I don't know you from the underside of a bull buffalo-hide, but I asked you here. I'm a peaceable man, but you both hark to my words or something besides Raton Crick water'll run down the pass. That poor girl's been desperate hurt. Even now her head bothers her. You two he-critters keep your distance and speak only when she speaks to you, or something will drop that you won't hear when it hits. I've spoken. Now we'll eat."

In silence the two joined him at the table. He ate voraciously but they merely played with the food. At the end of the meal Uncle Dick lighted his pipe and his fine face took on a more benign expression as he observed:

"The air round here seems to be solemncholy and funeral-like. S'pose we have a new deal with every one friendly and sensible? I ain't blaming young blood for warming up to a pretty girl. That's human natur', but it peeves me when a man tries to shine up to a girl who's lost her mem'ry, who hasn't any father."

"Hasn't any father?" curiously queried Keene. "Peace has told me something about her coming here, but how do you know she hasn't any father?"

"Well, if she has he ain't worth a cuss, or he'd be on hand to look after her," was the grim retort. "So, as the game now lays, I'm her pa. Now s'pose you two shake hands so we'll all be friendly and handsome-like."

Keene smiled good-naturedly and extended his hand. Peace hesitated, then frankly said:

"Don't think I'm nursing any hard feeling, but I can't take your hand now and mean it. Perhaps later I shall feel different. If you remain in the same frame of mind we won't lose anything by waiting, but if you change in the mean time it'll show there wasn't any call to shake now."

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"Have it your own way. Anything to keep things pleasant," said Keene carelessly.

Uncle Dick gave them a sharp, searching glance to assure himself they understood and would refrain from further quarreling; then he rose and tapped on the girl's door. She bade him enter, and he found her seated by the window, staring out at the sentinel peaks while the Arapaho woman brushed her hair.

She turned impulsively and when she saw Uncle Dick caught his hand in hers and looked up eagerly into his kindly face.

"You found something?" she murmured.

"Met old Satanta and got scared and come back," he replied. "That old cuss is up to mischief. You've heard of him?"

She shook her head.

"There was much talk about the Apaches," she said.

"That was when you were in New Mexico —probably Santa Fé. How's the mem'ry?"

Her voice held a little note of sadness as she answered:

"I find myself saying things that suggest other things, such as the convent, the South, Spanish-speaking people. I recall everything that happened since I recovered my senses here, but I remember nothing of how I came here or where I came from. I know I can ride a horse. I can see myself doing it, but I can't remember ever being on a horse."

"You're mind's keen as a brier. You'll remember everything if you'll just take your time and don't get to fretting," Uncle Dick heartily assured.

"I don't know," she faltered. "I still have silly notions. There was the sick man who frightened me when I saw the bandage across his face. Now it's stage-coaches."

"Stage-coaches?" blankly repeated Uncle Dick.

"They drive through the gate and the men crowd around them. Then I feel horribly afraid of something."

Uncle Dick thought of her up on Devil's Elbow, horrified to behold her kinsman participating in the hold-up of Turkey Bill's coach, and he pitied her from the depths of his great heart. Openly, however, he laughed at the notion and reassured her.

"Of course, you're nervous. You got a mighty bad bump on the head. Till you get used to things you'll feel shy and skittish at everything that seems new to you. Now there's Samuel Keene, the young man I said could come here. You probably didn't relish his coming."

"Oh, just the other way round!" she eagerly cried. "He's so awkward, so homely; and yet he seems very nice. He makes me laugh at what he says and does—only——"

He waited half a minute, then urged—

"Only what, Mary June?"

"Only he and Mr. Peace don't seem to like each other. It seems a pity when both are so nice. It isn't what they say, but what they think. I can feel them jar every time they look at each other."

"Two young fools," snorted Uncle Dick. "Mary June, don't you let either one get to talking any nonsense to you."

She stared at him blankly, then blushed crimson.

"Oh, nothing that way," she murmured. "They're both very nice and polite. If I could only have them round one at a time I should enjoy them both. They're entirely different. If they should talk any nonsense I should pretend I was losing my mind again. That would scare them."

"Haven't drawn any more picters?" he suddenly asked.

She shook her head.

"You don't remember anything connected with the name Purgatory?"

Another shake of the head.

"Nor the Picketwire?"

A third negative.

"El Rio," began the Arapaho woman, who had followed their English speech quite closely.

"—de las Animas Perditas!" hurriedly completed the girl, her gaze growing frightened.

"The Quail knows the old Spanish name," mumbled Uncle Dick, pretending not to notice her emotion.

"But why did I say that? The River of Lost Souls!" she cried.

"Because youv'e lived in New Mexcio and have heard it often, just as you remember the Alameda in Santa Fé," he soothed.

"But I spoke it without thinking. When I said the words, I could see the river racing and foaming between walls." She shivered violently and closed her eyes.

"What else?" whispered Uncle Dick.

"Skeletons!" she sobbed, dropping her head on her arm. "I shall never fully recover! When I think I'm improving that horrid thought pops into my head."

"I'm all sorts of an old fool to put ugly

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notions into your pretty head," growled Uncle Dick, awkwardly stroking her hair. "Don't try to remember anything. You're all right just as you are. You've recovered entirely. What does it matter if you don't remember some things? Some of them are bound to be disagreeable and best forgotten. Why, there's oceans and oceans of things I've let slip from my mem'ry. Just rest easy with being Mary June. Sometime, when we get round to it, we'll change it to Mary Wooton. If your old name ever does come back to you, you can slip it on or stick to mine. Now what about a bit to eat? I've eaten with the young men, as we had some things to talk over."

"The Quail will bring me something in here," answered the girl, patting the squaw's hand.

"Preety," gurgled the squaw. Then she spoke to Uncle Dick in Arapaho.

"She is the medicine-woman of the Purgatory."

"I know. But she remembers nothing of it. See you don't bring it back to her," warned Uncle Dick, rising.

IN THE big room he found Keene and Peace, seated far apart smoking their pipes. Keene rose and walked to the door, casting a quick glance at his host. Uncle Dick followed him outside, as the young man spoke.

"It's about that trade stuff. Two mule-loads in the corral if the Injuns ain't stolen it. Put your own price on it. What I really got you out here for was to ask if you wanted anything said about that man's death and the two nuggets of gold."

"No, not till I tell it."

"I reckoned as much. If Peace had been more neighborly I might have blurted it out."

"I probably shall tell Peace, but leave the telling to me. See here, my girl rather reckons she'd enjoy you two more if she took you separate. S'pose we fix it that way—that you two take turns talking to her?"

"That would be very pleasant, only what talking I do must be done quickly, as I shall soon be leaving here."

" I see," mused Uncle Dick. "South or north?"

"South. Now the trading jig is up I must get at something else."

"Too bad you and Joe couldn't hit it off better. You two could 'a' gone prospecting together."

"I had hoped to do that, but it's no good to feel sorry over what can't be helped. I wouldn't blame him for not wanting to bother with me even if he'd felt friendly. Perhaps I'll try it alone on my way south—that is, if you can outfit me."

"Reckon I have about everything a prospecter can use—left over from building the road," said Uncle Dick. "When do you want to start?"

Keene laughed softly and said:

"Perfectly willing to be rid of me, eh? I don't blame you. If I was as old as you I'd be slow to take up with strangers."

"What'n —— are you saying?" thundered Uncle Dick. "I reckon I can outfit you tomorrer."

Keene grimaced but agreed.

"Then I'll start tomorrow—rather sudden. Reckon I'll have a try at the gold-mine where Boy Charlie got those two nuggets. Must be somewhere between here and the Purgatory."

"Thought you was sharp-set to travel south?" reminded Uncle Dick.

"Changed my mind. I'll bet that Baptiste is already hoofing round to find where the nuggets came from."

"Then you'll stand a small chance of finding it first. He knows the country."

"I think I know where I can pick up a few thousand dollars," was the quiet reply.

Uncle Dick finished filling his pipe, his bushy brows bunching with perplexity as he watched Keene's care-free face.

"You must have heard Baptiste talk about the road-agents," he remarked.

"I think he has some understanding with them," readily replied Keene. "Not that any strangers came to see him, but he used to be gone several days at a time. He seemed to have plenty of gold, but he never brought back any furs or robes."

"Huh. He's a snake. Ever talk about Gentleman Ralph?"

With a slight start Keene turned away and then lazily answered:

"I may have. Don't remember."

"You've heard of Ralph?" demanded Uncle Dick, whose quick eyes had missed nothing in the other's behavior.

"Some odds and ends, but I'm new to the mountains. Come out from Missouri. Before that I lived up in Pennsylvania. Think I heard some of the wagon-train I was

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traveling with speak of him. They was always yarning about a new breed of outlaws, who stole whole trains and didn't leave a single soul to give evidence against them. Mostly bosh, I took it."

"Maybe," agreed Uncle Dick, "but I reckon there's no doubt but what the leader of the gang calls himself Gentleman Ralph. Ain't his real name, though. The Simon-pure Ralph was some critter. This recent chap sneaked the name. Probably a cheap cuss without brains enough to think up a new handle."

"Baptiste never let on anything about him, but that's not surprizing, as we two wa'n't what you'd call exactly chummy. I still reckon that the breed was in touch with the gang."

"And yet you'll risk your life going back there and prospecting for gold?" curiously asked Uncle Dick.

"It's because I believe the breed is in cahoots with the gang that I'm going. If I'm right I'll pick up a few thousand mighty easy."

Uncle Dick was completely at a loss to understand this speech.

"Just what do you mean by that, Mr. Samuel Keene?" he slowly inquired.

"You're forgetting the reward of five thousand offered for Boy Charlie, dead or alive," said Keene with a broad grin. "If Baptiste is in with the gang he won't disturb the grave to collect the reward, and I'll make five thousand without much work."

"Good Lord! Going to dig him up?" gasped Uncle Dick, taken aback by the young man's calmness in announcing his ghoulish program.

"Why not, if he's worth five thousand?" lightly replied Keene.

Uncle Dick studied him thoughtfully, then shook his head and observed:

"I may be mistook about you in several ways, but I'll bet a jug you've got your nerve with you. But here comes the stage, and it must be 'One-Eyed' Cassidy driving, by the way he's taking that down-grade."

It was the north-bound coach, and the six mules were finishing the two-mile stretch from the top of the ridge in a tearing gallop. Cries of alarm from the passengers were mingled with the stentorian calls of the driver and the pistol-like crack of his long lash. So terrific was the approach that Uncle Dick leaped to the middle of the road and waved his hat in protest.

As the animals were pulled up, the passengers hastily escaped pell-mell, firmly believing they were near victims of a runaway. One-Eyed Cassidy removed his foot from the brake and, with a broad grin, asked—

"Feared I was going through yer old gate?"

"I feared you was tearing up my toll-road," coldly retorted Uncle Dick. "What do you mean by taking my station that way?"

"Easy, old hoss-fly! When ye've had th' honor of bein' held up by Gentleman Ralph hisself, an' then let go without losin' a single penny, ye've got a right to celebrate by hittin' only th' high spots."

"The driver speaks truly, sir," spluttered one of the passengers. "This robber was very considerate. We travelers need to be protected from reckless drivers more than we do from road-agents."

"No guards, as usual," mused Uncle Dick. "What about the treasure-box?"

"None aboard this trip. Travelin' light, as a member of Congress is keen to git back to his lonesome constitooants," guffawed Cassidy, opening and closing his one optic in a pantomime of high derision. "Box to foller on th' next coach."

"This outlaw was dressed in black—quite distinguished-looking," informed another passenger.

"If you folks want to eat ye better hustle inside an' be sharp about it," growled the driver.

This stampeded the passengers to the eating-room. After they had crowded through the door, Cassidy grinned knowingly and slowly descended from the box.

"Why did he hold you up if he didn't want anything? And how do you know he is this Gentleman Ralph?" curiously asked Keene, who had remained an interested spectator of the scene.

"Mebbe I read his thoughts, young feller," sneered One-Eyed Cassidy, resenting a stranger's addressing him with a double-barrel question. "Mebbe I ain't tellin' what I know except to Dick Wooton."

He glared savagely at Keene's good-natured face, and the latter took the hint and turned on his heel and walked toward the corral.

UNCLE DICK puffed his pipe and waited. He knew Cassidy had further business with him, else he would be assailing the food inside. The driver cast a glance after Keene, then slyly

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produced a slip of paper from his belt and handed it to Uncle Dick, saying:

"Here it is, an' I want a line of writin' to show I delivered it. Save me from runnin' into a nest of trouble. Always want to prove I've done what I promised."

Uncle Dick opened the paper and read:

Please put my daughter, the girl you call Mary June, on the coach bringing this. Failure to do this will be bad medicine for you.

GENTLEMAN RALPH.

Uncle Dick puffed out his cheeks and rubbed his head thoughtfully. The information that Miss Mary was the daughter of the notorious bandit leader would have been a paralyzing piece of news, had he not already learned that her only known kinsman was buried on the bank of Muddy Creek.

"The —— liar!" he grunted.

"He said you'd give me somethin' which would be called for on the way down the pass."

"Yes, there's a answer," mumbled Uncle Dick, fishing out a scrap of paper and the stub of a pencil. "Give him this."

He laboriously wrote:

G. RALPH, so called:

Go plum to ——. Or you can come and fetch her away yourself. RICHENS LACY WOOTON.

"There! That oughter please him," he said, handing the folded paper to the driver. "But I don't see how you can give it to him in person if you left him on the south side of the pass."

"Can't, of course, but some of his men will stop me for the answer. Now I can eat."

As he rushed to the eating-room he nearly collided with Joe Peace. The latter hastened to Uncle Dick and cried:

"Seems there is a Gentleman Ralph beyond any doubt! The passengers were quite taken with him."

"Seems there sure is a cuss that's taken over the original Ralph's name. How'd you like to get a peep at some of the gang?"

"I'd like it," was the eager reply.

"You're likely to have a chance if you're careful," whispered Uncle Dick, producing the note and passing it over.

Peace read it and whistled in amazement.

"What did you answer?" he cried.

"Told him to go to ——"

"But to think Miss Mary's the daughter of this Ralph! Well, well."

"Bad, bad," corrected Uncle Dick. "That is, bad if it was true."

"But outlaws brought her here," protested Peace. "She must be related to some of them. Better the daughter of the king-pin than of a meaner dog."

"She ain't the daughter of any of 'em. Her dad's long since dead. None of the gang is a relation of hers. I found out that much while away. I ain't told her anything and I sha'n't. If her mem'ry comes back she'll know the truth without my saying anything."

"But what did you learn? How did you get hold of it?"

"The only relation she had is dead. His hist'ry died with him. He wasn't known round these parts," evaded Uncle Dick. "And what ain't known by you and every other young buck won't ever embarrass the girl. She starts life up here at the top of Raton Pass with a new deck."

"Then this message from Ralph is a lie," murmured Peace.

"Much like unto that," grimaced Uncle Dick.

"Think of his gall! Actually threatens you! What'll you do?"

"Stick along here and mind my knitting. Seems this Ralph wants to carry the pipe against me. All right. I've got a war-pipe of my own."

"If any of the gang stops Cassidy for your answer, I'll take a shot at them if I'm plugged for it. Wonder if that Keene would go along. I don't know whether he's got any fighting guts or not."

"I sort of reckon he'll assay out top-high," Uncle Dick gravely declared. "I'll swear he ain't gun-shy."

"I don't like him, but if he's game and will chip in we can do a good turn for the girl."

"Here he comes. S'pose you put it up to him?"

Keene came lounging round the station-house, the freckles on his whimsical face seeming to glint in the horizontal sunbeams. In another hour it would be growing dark at the foot of the pass. One-Eyed Cassidy emerged from the eating-room and climbed to his seat. The passengers cast a hurried glance over the wonderful horizon and reluctantly took their places inside. While Uncle Dick raised the gate, Peace confronted Keene.

"Some of the road-agents are expected to stop the coach down the pass to receive a message from Uncle Dick. The boss of the

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crowd wrote him and asked him something. Cassidy carries the reply. I'm going to tag along and probably shall have a run-in with the gang. Question is, are you game to take a hand?"

Keene shrugged his shoulders, hitched up his belt and drawled:

"Why not? Can't talk to the girl. Can't do much of anything up here. It oughter be exciting."

"I'm quite sure it will be," coldly replied Peace. "I'm off."

"I'll get my hoss and follow you," promptly assured Keene, running to the corral.

The coach lurched and swayed down the road. Peace rushed through the gate to follow behind it at about a hundred paces. He was turning the first bend in the road when Keene rode from the corral and hurried after him. He sat the saddle awkwardly, his feet thrust wide, altogether presenting an ungainly figure.

Uncle Dick lowered the gate and watched till coach and horsemen were swallowed up, then slowly returned to the house, meditating.

"Wonder how long before they come back. Well, if they bag any of the gang, it's five thousand apiece. Good luck go with them. Hate like —— to turn in till I know how it pans out."

LIGHTING a handful of dead brush in the fireplace, Uncle Dick watched its brief life die out, dreaming it was a camp-fire and that beaver was again king of the mountains and fetching eight to ten dollars a pound, and that hide and tallow hunters had not yet invaded the plains to slaughter the buffaloes. The crackle of the flames through the resinous wood and the sharp, yet soothing, reek of the smoke, furnished a background for his motley imagination.

He saw the hired and the free trappers come to the annual rendezvous. He saw them gambling away a season's profits, sitting cross-legged around a buffalo-robe. Euchre and seven-up, with beaver-pelts for currency. Horses and rifles and even their clothes were staked, also their squaws, if they possessed any. Through the dark smoke he evoked the memory of one old mountain-man who had wagered his scalp. The fancies were of the days when the Shoshoni, or Snakes, "hoss-an'-buff'lo Injuns," were mighty on the plains; when the Comanche, of Shoshonean stock, ruled the Southwest, driven there by Sioux tribes just as the Snakes had been pushed back to the mountains.

Uncle Dick's reverie, impelled by the fire and its intoxicating aroma, pictured the old-time trappers as being as primitive almost as the savages they lived and fought with. Once more he was with them, living in unmapped recesses of the mountains. From the Gila to the frozen ground of the far north, from the Mississippi to the outlet of the Colorado, he and his pals traveled and fought and played, within the space of time it took for tinder-like brush to be sucked up the stone chimney.

Between his fireplace and Pike's Peak was the site of a little trading-post known as "the Pueblo," built between 1840 and 1842; he couldn't exactly remember the date. It was only a quarter of a century old, and yet it was as thoroughly obliterated by the new life as if it had been the work of the mound-builders. Only the clear and rapid Arkansas remained the same, as it hurried on between the high bluffs that formerly encircled the old post.

Lifting his inner vision farther north, the mountaineer saw Fort Union on the upper Missouri. What a story could be told of the forked road starting at Independence and ending at Santa Fé and Willamette—endless battles with nature and the red men! He glimpsed the long paths traveled by the Hopi in seeking salt on the Colorado. It was like turning the pages of an old and well-thumbed book, this recalling the innumerable tribal alliances brought about by pursuit of the buffalo. What momentous migrations of entire Indian nations the disappearance of fur-bearing animals had caused! Crammed into the period of thirty years were changes and biological tragedies enough to have filled centuries. And Uncle Dick, before his bit of a brushwood fire, reviewed it all and was glad the new had come, though saddened that the old must go.

"I'm getting to be a dod-rotted old softy," he muttered, shaking his head to be rid of the spell, and instinctively following the habit of the early years in fumbling for his pipe-holder, gay with beads and quills, an indispensable part of a mountain-man's dress, but now relegated to the limbo of disuse. "No knowing as anything will happen, but, if something does happen, no knowing when they'll come back to tell me.

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Gentleman Ralph says she's his girl. Her uncle swore Ralph never knew she was with the gang. Seems Ralph's learned a lot since she was fetched here. I guess I'll turn in. If it wa'n't for Mary June, I'd 'a' gone along with the boys to take in the fun."

Again he fumbled at his neck for the pipe-holder, grinned sheepishly, placed his pipe in its orthodox box on the stone shelf and started to retire; but just then the girl glided into the room. With the little affectionate gesture he was so fond of, she took his hands.

"Didn't see you round when the passengers was here," he remarked. "You ain't fretted at the sight of strangers, be you? If so, say it, and I'll make them feed outdoors."

"No, no!" she quickly protested. "Not the passengers. I like to watch them and talk with them. I'm always thinking there might be one who would know me and say, 'Why, Miss Isobel——'"

With wildly staring eyes she looked up into his face, her lips mutely repeating the name that had so unconsciously come to her tongue.

"Isobel what?" he softly encouraged.

"I don't know. Isobel! Yes, it's my name—part of my name."

"I'm positive it is," he quietly assured. "Take it easy. The rest of the handle will pop into your mind before you know it. Don't try to think about it. No good trying to crowd it. Just let it loaf in when it gets ready. We're getting along fine, but if you don't mind the passengers why don't you mix more with them? Why stick so much in your room?"

"It's the stage-coach," she explained with a little shiver. "It's foolish of me, but every time I see one something tries to crowd into my thoughts that I'm afraid of. I think I'll say good night."

"Good night, Mary Isobel. Don't fret over nothing. Everything is coming fine."

He watched her pass into her room and heard the low, guttural voice of the Arapaho woman petting her. Then, with a mournful shake of his head, he made the rounds to see all was well and retired to his own little room, taking with him fragments of memories which slumber would piece together into a tapestry of the brave days.

He dreamed he was with Carson on a lonely mountain-stream and that the prince of mountain-men had cried out that red-skins were stealing their horses. Then came the shrill cry of warriors, and Carson was giving warning that it was an attack, rather than an attempt to stampede their horses. He rolled from the couch and came to his feet.

A WOMAN'S voice screamed somewhere in the house. This was no dream-cry. Fumbling about in the darkness for his clothes, he half-dressed and, seizing a revolver, plunged into the big room just as the cry was repeated, only this time either muffled or coming from a distance. Blundering to the girl's room, he threw back the door and called her name. He was answered by a groan and a thick voice grasping—

"Preety!"

Not pausing to learn how badly the Arapaho women was hurt, he rushed outdoors. A shot rang out beyond the gate and was followed by a grunt of pain. Then came the clatter of horses' hoofs. Racing recklessly to the road, he all but tripped over a dark object on the ground.

"Cut-Hand came too late," spoke the man in Arapaho. "Big Knife tried to stop them from taking the medicine-woman away."

Realizing pursuit afoot was useless, Uncle Dick helped the Indian to his feet, demanding—

"Are you badly hurt?"

"The white man's bullet cut my head," replied the Indian, stoical now that he had an audience. "There were two of them."

He was helping the Indian to the cook-house, where lights were springing up, when he suddenly halted, his wrathful eyes growing incredulous.

"Listen!" he cried. "Gorry-mighty! A stage-coach!"

"It goes down the pass," Big Knife informed.

"No coach has passed through the gate."

"It goes down the pass," was the curt response.

Leaving the mystery for future investigation, he got the Indian into the cook-house and ordered a trembling Mexican to make lights in the eating-room. Satisfying himself that Big Knife's wound was only a graze along the scalp, he followed the Mexican and, snatching up a light, entered the girl's room. The Quail was trying to rise and, on the entrance of Uncle Dick, promptly ceased her moaning. There was a brutal

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wound on her head, and only the thick braids of hair had saved her from a fractured skull. The window was open. The bed was undisturbed, and the girl was gone.

Big Knife, smeared with blood, now appeared behind him. Motioning him to help, Uncle Dick lifted the Quail to the bed and brought whisky. As her returning senses recognized the nature of the restorative she gulped it down eagerly. In answer to his fierce questioning she answered:

"The medicine-woman did not want to sleep. We sat at the open window. The door behind us opened and something like a big black bird fell over the pretty one. Then I was on the floor, my head full of queer noises and ghost-lights."

"Some one came through the door? You mean through the window!" cried Uncle Dick.

The Quail stared blankly at the ceiling. She had spoken. She would not speak again. Uncle Dick wheeled in time to save some of the liquor, but not before Big Knife had swallowed enough to make him forget his bloody head.

"Look after him," he commanded the shivering Mexican.

With that he darted to his room and completed his dressing; then, taking his rifle and a second revolver, he rushed outdoors.

Down the pass sounded voices yelling in fear and rage. They were approaching the open gate. Completely bewildered but hoping the girl had been rescued, Uncle Dick halted at the gate and waited.

At last figures were discernible and, above the general clamor, rose the husky voice of One-Eyed Cassidy exhausting his vocabulary of oaths. "Shut up that racket!" bawled Uncle Dick, running to meet them. "Did you get the girl?"

"What girl?" bellowed Cassidy.

"Miss Mary?" gasped the voice of Joe Peace.

A blur detached itself from the mass and limped ahead rapidly.

"What about Miss Mary?"

"Stolen! What was that hullabuloo I heard? I hoped you'd got her."

"——!" howled Peace, raising his clenched fists in impotent rage. "She must have been in the coach when it rode through us."

"The coach? Who's in this party, anyway?" thundered Uncle Dick.

"Cassidy and the passengers," groaned Peace.

"Where's Keene?"

"Ask Gentleman Ralph," was the bitter reply.

CHAPTER V

UNCLE DICK TAKES THE TRAIL

AFTER the passengers were disposed of for the night Uncle Dick requested Peace to relate what had happened in the pass. As the young prospector talked, the mountaineer worked over his weapons, bringing them up to the last degree of efficiency. He even bothered to hunt up a little whetstone in a buckskin case, a relic of his trapping days, in order to give his knife a razor edge.

"Keene was behind me," began Peace. "I pulled in for him to come up, knowing that if there was any fighting it was for him and me to handle it. He suggested that we separate and ride along the edge of the bush on each side of the road. This move would let us draw near the gang when they stuck up the coach and, so long as we kept under cover, they couldn't know that only two men were attacking them.

"It was a good idea, only things didn't pan out right. I hadn't been in the bush two minutes when a hunk of lead whipped across from the other side of the road and plugged my horse through the neck. The poor beast went down with hardly a kick. The coach then was a good quarter of a mile ahead. I lost time in trying to nail the skunk across the road. Then came a howl from the passengers and I knew they was held up.

"Keeping under cover, I worked along but I hadn't covered hardly any of the distance when the coach came swinging back up the grade. I took it for granted One-Eyed Cassidy had managed to turn about and was making a run for it. I yelled out and the driver took a shot at me. 'One-Eyed Cassidy mistakes me for an outlaw,' I told myself. There was a bunch of men down the road, and I couldn't understand why they didn't mount their horses and chase the coach, or at least fire after it. I never suspected they weren't agents until I'd lost fifteen or twenty minutes crawling up to where I could do the most damage; then to my amazement I heard Cassidy swear.

"I felt knocked in a heap. Cassidy was before me in the road, so he couldn't have

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been on the box when the coach went by, but, if he wasn't driving the coach, then it must have been an agent. But why on earth should one of the gang drive the coach back to the toll-gate where you'd recognize him and try to pot him? It all seemed very crazy. I called out my name so Cassidy wouldn't shoot, and joined him. Cassidy said they was held up and not a second wasted by the outlaws in making the passengers pile out into the road. Cassidy was driven from the box. One man kept them covered while two others took the coach back. I tried to locate the man who had stood guard over them, but he had slipped away while I was making myself known."

"Didn't care to meet up with you," growled Uncle Dick.

"We all started for the toll-gate and was 'most there when we heard the coach coming, and coming hard. It was upon us in the darkness almost before we knew it. The passengers dug for cover. Cassidy and me took some shots at the box and received some back. It was all over in no time. If I'd had any idea Miss Mary was inside, I'd have chased it afoot."

"Wouldn't have done any good," gloomily said Uncle Dick. "They used the coach to get the girl away to some point where they'd feel safe to pack her on a horse. You haven't said anything about Keene."

"I didn't see hide nor hair of him after we separated to scout the bush on both sides of the road."

"And that's what you meant when you said, 'Ask Gentleman Ralph'?"

"Well, he isn't with us—hasn't been with us. I won't put it any stronger 'n that. You know I don't like him, and when you don't like any one it's easy to think him a bad one, so I'll keep mum."

"Exactly," mused Uncle Dick, scowling heavily. "He was a neighbor to Baptiste, the trader. They was fighting over a dead man but not doing each other any harm. I haven't any doubt but what Baptiste is a go-between for the gang. He'd never stick up a coach, but he'd do lots of spying for them. He'd send word when a heavy box was coming through."

"They fought over a dead man?" puzzled Peace.

"To be correct they fought over what he had on him. No time to give the whole yarn now."

"But who was he?"

Uncle Dick was now making for the door, anxious to get into action. On the threshold he paused only long enough to say—

"One of the agents—Boy Charlie."

"—— hinges! Boy Charlie? Potted? Who was lucky enough to rub him out?" cried Peace.

"No place to talk here. We'll powwow as we ride. I'm off to get the girl."

Peace lost no time in finding a horse. As they rode down the toll-road with the night raising a black wall before them, they listened for some sound of the outlaws climbing the steep slopes on either hand. In an undertone Uncle Dick told what he knew of the girl's abduction.

"But Boy Charlie—how came he to cash in?" interrupted Peace.

Uncle Dick described the scene at Muddy Creek but revealed nothing about Boy Charlie's slayer and victim, nor did he say anything about the rough map and the relationship between Miss Mary and the second outlaw. He was reticent because he wished to keep the facts from the girl for all time, providing she did not recover her memory and recall what she had seen from the Devil's Elbow.

"Charlie just rode up to the creek, dying from a hole clean through him, and Keene and Baptiste quarreled over some gold he had on him," was Uncle Dick's summary.

Peace remained silent for several minutes, then said:

"If the agents are fighting among themselves then Gentleman Ralph's game can't last long. It must have been another agent that drilled him."

"If it wasn't, we'd hear some one bragging of what he'd done and asking for the reword," said Uncle Dick. "Ralph's game won't last a second after I get him at the end of a gun."

"If he was shot by one of the gang they must have quarreled over something," mused Peace.

"They're hot-headed. May have been drunk."

"Maybe Gentleman Ralph shot him," suggested Peace.

"I don't think so," demurred Uncle Dick. "If he's what they crack him up to be no man he plugged would ride to Muddy Crick. He'd drop where he was hit."

"The Overland Company ought to hire some gun-fighters to take their coaches through. If I was the boss I'd rig a coach

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that was gun-proof, pick up a few bad men and send them out to be held up. Once the agents stubbed against one or two such traps every coach would look like an ambush to them."

"That's a mighty good idee!" indorsed Uncle Dick. "Turkey Bill is a prime driver and never held himself up to be anything else, but Cassidy always claimed to be a two-gun man, even if he has got only one eye. Oughter be ashamed to let one man hold him up."

"One man's good as a dozen if he has the drop on you," was the terse response. "I know, for I've been through it." Then he continued forcefully, "But no one man will ever hold me up again unless he kills me."

"Good boy! Now here we are at the lake. I can almost make things out. They never planned to take the coach out of the pass and I have a notion they quit it about here. Look round and see if you can locate it."

He had scarcely said this when a mule brayed dead ahead, and they found the coach abandoned on one side of the road. There was nothing to indicate on which side of the pass the outlaws had escaped, but Uncle Dick, recalling the bullet fired at him from the west side a few days before, wheeled to the left.

"Figuring it must be one side or the other, eh?" mused Peace.

"I know it's this side," Uncle Dick quietly responded. "We can't do much till daylight, however."

Peace fumed and cursed the darkness and at last declared:

"It's a bit lighter. I can't stay here like a stick any longer. If they went up this side there must be a path. I'll mouse round. You stay here. I'll leave my nag and will be back by sun-up."

HE ENTERED the pines and worked along slowly, his footsteps advertising his course for some minutes. These sounds grew fainter and fainter and finally ceased. Uncle Dick seated himself between the two horses and lighted his pipe. Two hours passed and the east began to put on paint, layer after layer, topping off with a vermilion, much like a warrior decorating his face for battle. Suddenly the pass lost its obscurity. The entire length of the ragged hem of pine emerged from the darkness and stood clearly defined. Rising and stretching his arms, Uncle Dick put up his pipe and climbed into the saddle, holding his rifle over the pommel. Outwardly he was composed; inwardly he fretted at Peace's failure to return. At last he tethered his young friend's horse and turned his own animal toward the steep slope.

Near the edge of the plateau, where the rocky shelf ended abruptly and left only room for the toll-road to crowd along beside Raton Creek, he came to a spot where the drooping pine-boughs showed broken needles and twigs. Urging his horse into what seemed to be an impenetrable barrier, he bowed his head and soon found himself permitted to sit erect in the shadowy tunnel which extended far up the rough slope.

He knew this must be one of the hidden paths used by the bandits. He held his rifle in both hands and allowed his mount to pick his own footing up the narrow trail. The growth on either side was practically impassable to horsemen, and the path he was following was not entirely the work of nature. The frequent raw stubs showing through the carpet of needles showed the work of an ax.

"Derned young fool to go ahead alone when he might have come back and told me," grumbled the mountaineer.

Now the way ascended a sharp grade and apparently terminated on a ridge. Uncle Dick slipped from the saddle and sent the horse scrambling on ahead. Traveling in this fashion, he not only spared his mount but also interposed a bulwark between himself and any possible ambush at the top of the ridge. The steady ascent suggested a retreat high up the wall of the pass, but such a hiding place, bound to be something of a cul-de-sac at the best, impressed the mountaineer as being illogical and not in keeping with the reputed shrewdness of the mysterious leader.

"If this path keeps going it'll prove this gang is a bunch of idiots," he growled, beginning to find the footwork laborious.

The ridge was gained without his encountering any opposition, and now he found the trail split, one fork swinging back south and presumably running parallel to the face of the cliff, the other dipping north, as if to strike the mouth of the pass at a considerable distance below the little lake. Uncle Dick elected to follow the latter trail, as the other must debouch into the main road somewhere near the toll-gate. His

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new course, for some distance, ran under an overhanging cliff, with the pines crowding close on his right. As he had no desire to be ambushed by the kidnapers, he advanced most cautiously. Could he know that the outlaws had utilized this inside route to reach the mouth of the pass, his task would have been very simple and he could press on at full speed, but the cliff on his left was continually presenting little pockets where a dozen men could hide very comfortably, and it was the fear of stumbling upon the enemy in some such hiding-place that frequently caused him to halt and weigh the risk.

Finally he reached a point where he could see that the trail ahead ran smack into a solid somber wall of pine, indicating that it must turn almost at right angles. He wondered what trap might be lying in wait for him just round the bend, and, walking behind his horse, he held his rifle ready. On reaching the turn, he found it followed a shoulder of the ledge and led out on to a small plateau.

"The Devil's Elbow!" he softly exclaimed, halting his horse and dropping on all fours. "The girl was up here, but she never came the way I came. There must be other trails leading from this shelf.

He crawled toward the edge of the plateau until he could see the road below. It was from this point that the girl had been horrified at beholding the robbery of Turkey Bill's stage.

Lying prone, he reconnoitered the toll-road. It wound in and out among the pines, crossing Raton Creek many times. In places the creek flowed under large flat rocks and was hidden from view. Uncle Dick could not resist a thrill of pride as he stared down on the road his hands had constructed between the towering gray rocks and the gloomy evergreens.

He had been among the first to prove that Raton Pass could be used by pack-animals. He was the first to realize that, by blasting and bridge-building, it could be made fit for freighters, immigrant trains and stage-coaches. It had been left for him to open a short-cut to Trinidad and northeastern New Mexico, but, in constructing his road and dealing only with essentials, he had never taken the time to indulge his curiosity concerning the narrow, crooked plateau or shelf called the Devil's Elbow.

As he watched, he saw something moving far down the road and made out a horseman ascending. The road twisted and turned and was lost to sight in patches, and the horseman was hugging the edge of the pines. His pace was leisurely and, from Uncle Dick's coign of vantage, he scarcely seemed to move. Then the road vanished and for some minutes the mountaineer patiently waited, his gaze glued on the point where it emerged into view again. He began to believe the horseman had halted when he suddenly galloped into view. Now he was near enough for the watcher to study his features, had not his face been concealed by a handkerchief.

"One of the —— gang!" excitedly whispered Uncle Dick, pushing his rifle over the edge of the rock and estimating the range. "Mustn't overshoot."

Before he could get the range and try his skill a disconcerting thing happened. A second horseman darted into view almost beneath the shelf and rode rapidly down the road. This rider also wore a handkerchief across his face. With two to choose from, Uncle Dick was flurried for a moment, his gun-barrel wabbling first to one, then back to the other. Each kept close to the pines and both were approaching a bend in the road. Until they rounded the bend neither could see the other.

"They'll meet about in front of that broken pine. When they do I'll lambast the two of them," decided Uncle Dick, training his rifle on a lightning-shattered tree-stump at the head of the bend.

But, if the unexpected appearance of road-agent number two had startled the mountaineer, the bit of drama to follow astounded him. The two horsemen drew nearer each other, neither suspecting the other's approach until both began rounding the bend. Then the sounds of their horses' hoofs must have given a mutual alarm, for each man straightened and peered ahead, and the next minute they were face to face.

As Uncle Dick stared they raised their rifles and fired at each other. The next moment the one who had been ascending the road whirled and galloped at breakneck speed over his back-trail, the second masked figure pursuing and shooting. The fugitive discarded his rifle for his revolver and, twisting in the saddle, emptied his weapon. Then the road dipped from view and Uncle Dick awoke from his trance to realize that he had been a passive spectator.

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"By old Pike's Peak!" he roared, shaking his rifle in fury. "To think of me sprawling out here and letting two of the critters get away from me and nary a shot from my gun! Next thing I know they'll be fighting duels in my station and I'll be sleepily watching 'em with never a word to say. I reckon young Joe was right when he 'lowed Miss Mary needed a protector."

THE exciting spectacle, however, decided him to press on down the strange trail. He hoped to strike the mouth of the pass. The exchange of shots also satisfied him that no bandits were lurking along the cliffs in the neighborhood of the plateau.

As he made to secure his horse a faint cry up the pass caught his attention. Several men were grouped about the stage-coach and, as they seemed to be straightening out the mules, he deduced they were the passengers and One-Eyed Cassidy about to resume their interrupted trip.

Climbing into the saddle he pricked his mount along the trail and soon found himself descending a steep grade, but, as he rode, he discovered the trail did not swing in toward the mouth of the pass as he had hoped. He now began to catch broad glimpses of the lowlands, and he knew he had diverged several miles from the entrance of the pass. To accentuate his chagrin he soon found himself facing the choice of two routes. One held straight ahead and descended into a narrow cañon, through which he could pass, he presumed, to the open country. The other swung toward the west, leaving the cañon between it and the pass.

Grunting a favorite oath he dismounted and studied the terrain. The pass, the narrow cañon and the westerly trail, were three giant fingers extended to rest on the prairie. Uncle Dick elected to descend through the cañon. Leading his horse, he pressed ahead looking for signs of recent passers-by and finding none. He had nearly come to where the actual descent into the cañon began, when he caught the smell of burning wood. Leaving his horse, he entered the débris of landslides and wash and cautiously advanced until he could look down into the cañon.

Almost beneath him was a rude shelter of poles and boughs. A fire was burning before this. At one side were picketed a dozen horses. He knew he had stumbled upon one of the outlaws' resting-places along the route they took in gaining the pass, but it was not the sight of the horses and the figures of men sprawling on the ground that caused him to half-rise and aim his rifle. It was the glimpse of a woman suddenly appearing at the entrance of the shack. His view of her was momentary, for no sooner did she show herself than a man sprang from the ground and ran toward her, waving his arms and driving her back.

"If that ain't Miss Mary June Wooton, I'm a liar!" he whispered. "And there's a dozen of 'em. A dozen? A round score."

The amendment was made as a little cavalcade came riding up the cañon. The men on the ground glanced up lazily and continued their smoking. Uncle Dick believed he was gazing on the full force of Gentleman Ralph.

As the newcomers came up to the shack and dismounted, the mountaineer observed that only one had his features concealed. He wore a black mask that began with his hat-brim and ended below his chin. He gave some orders and a man dashed water on the fire, while several of the loungers sprang to their feet and, taking their rifles, hurried toward the mouth of the cañon.

"That's Ralph himself," muttered Uncle Dick. "He's afraid the smoke from the fire may give him away."

The man in the mask spoke again and pointed toward the upper end of the cañon. Two men caught up their arms, mounted and rode to where the trail led up to Uncle Dick's position. They rode leisurely and carelessly and he did not think his presence was suspected, yet their coming forced him to move back. Crawling to his horse, he seized the bridle and stole along the westerly trail.

His problem was to avoid discovery until he could rescue the girl. To enter the cañon by stealth, except as he chanced it at night, was well-near impossible, and he had no idea the outlaws contemplated more than a brief halt in the place. The cañon was scarcely more than a crack through the mountain and, with the exception of occasional boulders dotting its floor, lacked covering of any kind. Doubtless a few riflemen could hold the opening against many, while the upper end, thanks to the alluvium, contained a back-door, steep and rugged, yet

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presenting no great difficulties to the saddle-wise.

If pursued into the cañon, the gang only had to ride up the upper slope to gain the hidden trails leading in various directions. By means of these secret paths, probably unknown to law-abiding men, the bandits could double back to the lowlands, moving in small bands over different routes and reassembling at their main rendezvous somewhere along the Purgatory. Already Uncle Dick's partial knowledge of the byways proved that the gang could move parallel to the toll-road or strike into it at numerous points.

"They couldn't found a better or handier place than these old Raton Mountains," Uncle Dick proudly told himself.

The plight of the girl worried him intensely, although he did not believe she was in any immediate danger. His fear was for the effect of her startling capture on her overwrought nerves. Could he gather a posse of fighting-men, he would bottle both ends of the cañon and get both the gang and the girl, but fighting men in numbers were not to be found offhand.

For a moment he entertained the fanciful notion of waylaying the stage-coach and impressing the passengers and driver into service. The passengers, however, were sure to be an unknown quantity in fighting-courage, while the driver might be a Turkey Bill, hired to drive and not to hunt robbers. The guards who should be escorting each coach were being concentrated for duty on the division threatened by Indians.

"Reckon that leaves me only Injuns to count on," he mused as he hurried along the trail. "The promiscuous visiting of the Arapahoes at the station shows that some of Big Knife's people must be down below somewhere. Give me a band of 'em, decently armed, and I'll play 'em against the agents —if I can lead 'em."

By this process of elimination he arrived at the conclusion that he must either attempt the girl's rescue single-handed, or trust to rounding up a village of Arapaho warriors. Even if he and Joe Peace had not become separated, the odds would have remained too great for them to face. In fact, he was glad Peace was not with him, for he believed the young prospector would lose all sense of discretion and essay a reckless attack on the camp. Uncle Dick's courage was of the highest quality because it was based on common sense. He felt that to get himself killed while endeavoring to free Miss Mary would be a crime against her.

"Joe would be for riding down on 'em, both guns barking. All right for a fiery young cuss that admires a lively finish, but if I get rubbed out I'm no more use to the girl than some three-point Mackinaw blanket I used thirty years ago. It ain't as if Injuns had her and would kill her before they'd let her be rescued—but why the —— did they steal her?"

This query gave him a jolt. Heretofore he had lived each minute of his quest separately. Now he began to assemble and put ideas together. Why should a gang of road-agents, working under a central control and fully realizing their harvest season must be brief, bother itself with a woman captive? Gentleman Ralph obviously possessed enough brains to know that, once the plains Indians were securely tucked away on their reservations, the authorities would lose no time in erasing the white pest. It was because he had appreciated the conditions of unrest and spasmodic uprisings among the red men, that the outlaw leader had emerged from Mexico to make his pile.

"There's no two ways about it," slowly decided Uncle Dick, speaking aloud for the benefit of his horse, "it can't be ransom they're after; they haven't time to arrange the terms, even if they knew she had some rich folks ready to pay up. It's a case of stealing her to make her tell something they want to know. Chuckle-Luck and Boy Charlie and her uncle knew about the nuggets. The last two are dead. Chuckle-Luck tried to play the hand alone, but with Charlie dropping out he had to tell his boss.

"They reckon the outlawing business is picayune alongside of finding the spot where she picked up free gold. This Ralph knows a month of honest mining would bring him more gold than a year of robbing would be likely to do. But no matter why they took her, they've got to be shot up for it, and she must be returned to her new dad, Richens Lacy Wooton.

"Ho, old boy! Easy! We're nearly down to level again and I reckon I can spell my legs."

Reining in at the foot of the last long slope, he studied his back-trail for a few minutes and then swung into the saddle.

He was now committed to the plan of using the friendly Arapahoes. That the

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"blue-sky" men were somewhere near the cañon and the mouth of the pass, he had no doubt. The sudden arrival and departure of the Quail's people at the station satisfied him of this fact. He rode over the broken country, eagerly gazing about in search of a smoke. He had no intention of quitting the shelter of the foot-hills unless it was to ride to an Arapaho camp, for, once he drew away from the high cliff on his right, which separated him from the cañon, he would be courting discovery by any bandit outpost.

FROM the corner of his eye he became suddenly conscious of motion on his left and attempted to turn to guard against it. Before he could more than sense the need of a defensive action, however, something dropped over his head, tightened about his body and pinioned his arms to his side. His horse snorted in fright and would have leaped from under him had not his knees and powerful voice reduced the animal to obedience. He guided his mount to a heap of rocks where a brawny savage was gleefully holding the noosed rope taut.

One glance and the mountaineer was joyfully exclaiming—

"Arapaho!" Then he spoke to his captor. "Why do you throw a rope round Cut-Hand?"

The warrior stared into his face blankly for a moment, then grunted in disgust at his ill luck, shook the noose loose and apologized.

"Cut-Hand wears the white man's hat over his eyes. Standing Bull thought it was another—a bad white man."

"Bad white men are near, but are too many for the Bull to rope," informed Uncle Dick. "Where is your camp? Take me there quick!"

The Indian leisurely disappeared among the rocks and soon came forth on a wiry pony. With a lash of his quirt he pivoted and raced round the mountaineer, but showed no haste in taking a straightaway course.

"Who is at the head of your camp? Hosa?" impatiently asked Uncle Dick.

"Yellow Bear."

Uncle Dick would have preferred it to be Little Raven, yet Yellow Bear, like others of his people, always had expressed a great liking for the toll-gate keeper and more than once in passing the barrier, had left dressed buckskin as a gift.

"It is well. He is my friend. He will help me," said Uncle Dick.

"Yellow Bear makes medicine," was the somewhat sullen response.

Uncle Dick glanced at him sharply but learned nothing from the immobile features. The Bull's maneuvers to delay their departure for the camp were also disquieting.

"Why new medicine? Is he hunting buffalo? Are his women dressing hides?"

"He gives a feast," said the Bull with a trace of hesitation in his manner.

"He boils for some one who comes to see him. Who?" demanded Uncle Dick.

"He makes a feast for his new medicine. He moves the village. The lodges are down. Let Cut-Hand go home on top of the mountain. When we make our new camp, Standing Bull will come for him and the Arapahoes will make him a big feast," replied the Bull.

"For whom does Yellow Bear boil?" repeated Uncle Dick.

The Bull stared straight ahead, playing with his quirt and deaf to the question, but at that moment the soft breeze brought the answer—the faint notes of a bugle sweetly played far off.

"Satanta of the Kiowas is there. Yellow Bear does not make medicine. He listens to bad talk," accused Uncle Dick sternly.

"I am Cut-Hand's friend," sullenly reminded the Bull. "Go to the mountain."

"So is Satanta my friend even when he makes bad talk," said Uncle Dick. "I was at his camp a few sleeps ago. He was after some Ute horse-thieves. I am glad he is with the Arapahoes. I have a talk from Colonel Leavenworth for him."

"Leavenworth is our friend," admitted Standing Bull. "He stopped the Long Knives from fighting us two Summers ago. General Dodge wanted to fight us. There were many Indians south of the upper Arkansas then. We would have made a good fight, but we did not want to fight."

"Then we will ride to the camp. Satanta will be glad to hear from his friend."

Saying this, Uncle Dick spoke to his horse.

"We must wait. My pony is lame," persisted the Indian.

"Are the Arapahoes friends of Cut-Hand, or not?" asked Uncle Dick.

"We must wait," repeated the Bull.

Again the mellow song of the bugle blew down the wind, and now Uncle Dick

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glimpsed a wisp of blue smoke against the blue-black background of the hills.

"You are tired. I will send a fresh pony out to you," he cried, suddenly spurring ahead.

He had covered but a short distance when Standing Bull overtook him and, without a word, rode by his side.

When the camp opened to view Uncle Dick estimated it held some two score warriors. The women and children apparently had been sent back into the hills, for he saw none. Their absence gave a grave complexion to Yellow Bear's purpose. Satanta's presence could only be explained on the theory that he was bringing a war-pipe to the Arapahoes.

As the two horsemen rode down on the camp, the Bull waved a signal and the warriors sprang to their feet and called others from the lodges to gather in a line before the newcomers. The aggressive semicircle relaxed as they recognized Uncle Dick, but the mountaineer sensed an air of restraint in their greeting and he knew his visit would have been more welcome at some other time; nor did he see Yellow Bear or Satanta.

As he halted in the center of the group of Indians and dismounted, Standing Bull was at his side and placed a strong hand on his arm, announcing:

"Cut-Hand is tired. He will sleep in my lodge."

The warriors fell back, leaving a passage to one of the lodges. The Bull sought to guide Uncle Dick to this shelter, but the mountaineer shook off the hand and tersely informed—

"Cut-Hand will talk with Yellow Bear and Satanta before he sleeps."

Pushing two warriors aside, he strode toward the lodge which he knew housed the chief.

The men glided before him to block his path, one of them declaring:

"Our friend must turn back. Yellow Bear makes new medicine."

"Then he makes war-medicine and is foolish," cried Uncle Dick.

"He makes medicine to help him catch the Pawnees who stole our ponies."

"Satanta is with him. Satanta is after the Utes who stole his ponies," sarcastically replied the mountaineer. "How long since Cut-Hand can spoil medicine that is made against thieves? I come to make medicine against thieves—against white thieves. I will talk with Yellow Bear now."

The Indians stood irresolute but gave ground as Uncle Dick boldly advanced.

The conversation had attracted the attention of Yellow Bear, who now threw back the flap from the opening of his lodge and thrust out his scowling visage. At sight of the mountaineer the anger left his face, but Uncle Dick knew his visit was not relished.

"My brother will come again after two sleeps, and Yellow Bear will make him a feast," said the chief.

"CUT-HAND comes to tell about two mule-loads of presents he has bought for his friends, the Arapahoes," replied Uncle Dick, advancing. "I have a talk for you and for Satanta. The talk can not wait. My medicine is strong. It told me I should find you two together."

With ill grace Yellow Bear stood aside and Uncle Dick entered the lodge. Opposite the entrance, the place of honor, sat Satanta, a deep scowl on his strong face. On both sides of him were grouped several leading men of the Arapahoes. These stared blankly at the ground, ignoring the mountaineer. Ordinarily the entrance of Wooton would have been greeted with warm informality and kindly salutations, as befitting the reception of an intimate friend. The studied silence instantly warned him that his mission was to be considered as a formal matter and aside from the claims of friendship.

Passing to the west of the lodge, Uncle Dick made to seat himself beside Satanta, but that wily diplomat, relaxing his stern features into an amiable smile, quietly shifted from the place of honor and, with a slight gesture, motioned for Wooton to be seated.

Uncle Dick bowed and dropped cross-legged on to the buffalo robe. Yellow Bear resumed his place next to the entrance. The silence continued unbroken for some minutes, the expected preface to any formal conference; then a warrior said—

"Wolf-Coming-Out has taken a wife."

This inconsequential remark was in keeping with the etiquette of indulging in trivialities before broaching serious matters. A pause followed, and then another warrior remarked:

"The cows are very fat. We shall have a bad Winter;"

With eyes gazing at his feet, Uncle Dick

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waited while bits of camp gossip were exchanged—detached and unimportant scraps of information relating to the domestic affairs of one man or the hunting prowess of another. Suddenly Satanta lifted his head and abruptly asked:

"Cut-Hand brings a talk for his Kiowa friend? Does be speak it here, or some time when we are alone?"

"I have a talk for Settainte of the Eiks who sit in the second place of the Kiowa circle and who lead in giving the pipe. I have a talk for Yellow Bear of the Arapahoes. I speak so all men can hear and bring no talk to be spoken behind a bush."

His intention to speak freely before all the circle was listened to in deep silence. At last Yellow Bear said—

"The ears of the Arapahoes are open."

Uncle Dick waited a few moments and then began.

"At the lodge on the mountain are presents for the Arapahoes. Big Knife is there and shall bring them to Yellow Bear and Little Raven and their men." Then, turning to the expressionless face of Satanta, he continued: "Presents also await the Kiowas, but Settainte's people must go and get them from the hands of Colonel Leavenworth. Colonel Leavenworth does not understand why his friend, the White Bear, is up here at the foot of the Raton Range, when the peace-pipe is filled and ready for him to smoke."

"Ute warriors ran off Kiowa horses," mumbled Satanta.

"Cheyennes and Dakotas talked with White Bear about it in his camp at Muddy Creek," gravely remarked Uncle Dick. "They talked in the sign-language before entering the Bear's lodge."

Satanta's face flushed with rage as he informed—

"One of my men found a snake hid among the rocks."

"But he did not harm the snake," reminded Uncle Dick.

This veiled allusion to Wooton's spying on the camp and the statement that Satanta had held an important conference with northern Indians was obviously news to the Arapahoes, for they exchanged startled glances with their chief.

Yellow Bear made haste to announce:

"The Arapahoes are friendly to the whites. We will not receive a war-pipe. Let Cut-Hand send his presents."

Satanta saw his plans crumbling.

"The Arapahoes are women to care for the white man's presents. They are only for children to play with. The Kiowas have stolen so many white women and sold them back for gold that they know gold is strong medicine."

"The White Bear shall have gold if he does as Cut-Hand says," quickly assured Uncle Dick. "There are bad white men in a narrow cañon near here. They hold as prisoner a medicine-woman of my race. For every bad white taken to Cimarron City, dead or alive, five thousand dollars will be paid—enough gold to send a wagon-train of presents to the Kiowa nation."

Satanta stiffened and a wolfish look crept into his eyes.

"I must have the medicine-woman back unharmed," added Uncle Dick. "The Arapahoes and Satanta can have the bad whites."

"Why do you ask the help of White Bear, one man, when you have the Arapahoes, many men, to help?" directly demanded Satanta. "Are the Arapahoes women?"

"They are very brave, but none of them plays the bugle," explained Uncle Dick.

For nearly five minutes the Indians remained motionless with bowed heads; then they began stealing admiring glances at the mountaineer.

"I will play the bugle," abruptly agreed Satanta.

"And the Arapahoes are not women," sternly spoke up Yellow Bear with a challenging glance at Satanta.

"They are friends to the Kiowas. They must be brave men," replied the Kiowa chief.

"Then we come to this: The Arapahoes receive my presents. The Kiowas will go to Colonel Leavenworth and make a peace treaty on Medicine-Lodge Creek."

Uncle Dick paused and stared at the two chiefs. Yellow Bear bowed his head. Satanta was more reticent, but finally promised—

"I will make the treaty."

"Now for my affair!"

Uncle Dick briefly narrated to them the theft of the girl and the need of her immediate rescue.

"The Arapahoes shall divide. Part of them, with White Bear to play the bugle, shall ride to the mouth of the cañon. The others, under Yellow Bear, shall ride up the

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hills to the end of the cañon. When the Bear plays 'charge' the bad whites will believe the soldiers are coming and will ride up the trail at the end of the cañon. Then Yellow Bear and his men shall meet them."

"How will Cut-Hand get the medicine-woman?" eagerly asked Yellow Bear.

Uncle Dick fumbled at his chin, then explained—

"I must take my chances when they try to leave the cañon."

"The attack must be made when it is dark. The medicine-woman may be hurt by the bullets," said an Arapaho.

"I would enter the cañon, if there was a path not guarded by the thieves, and take the girl when the fighting began," said Uncle Dick.

"There is a path," quietly spoke up one of the Arapaho warriors. "With a long rope I can help Cut-Hand get down the cliff."

What had impressed Uncle Dick with being rather a forlorn hope, yet the only alternative if he would try to rescue Miss Mary, now glittered with strong possibilities of success, and it was with great enthusiasm that he sketched out on the ground a map of the cañon and the outlaws' position therein. As he marked the location of the shack, the Arapaho man who knew the path reached forward and, with the point of his knife, indicated the spot where an unsuspected descent to the cañon floor could be made. It would bring the mountaineer nearly behind the shack.

"Now I will go to Standing Bull's lodge and sleep," cried Uncle Dick. "We will start as soon as it is dark."

"I will send two of my young men to see that the thieves do not steal away from their camp before night," said Yellow Bear.

"The Indians who came to my camp near Muddy Creek were bad Indians. They wanted to make trouble between me and Colonel Leavenworth," piously informed Satanta as Uncle Dick rose to go. "When they began to talk I made them go away. Cut-Hand can say that to Leavenworth in a talking paper."

"It shall be told him," gravely promised Uncle Dick. "Shall I say anything about a snake among the rocks?"

Satanta snapped his fingers disdainfully, saying:

"Leavenworth is a big man. His ears are not open to foolish things. One of my warriors fell asleep and tumbled off a rock and dreamed he fell on a snake that hurt his neck."

Having obtained the great Kiowa's promise to sign the treaty on Medicine-Lodge Creek, a most vital step in averting a general uprising if the promise were kept, Uncle Dick withdrew to the lodge of the Bull. He would have been well content with the day's work if it were not for his worry concerning Miss Mary.

TO BE CONTINUED

SEA LURE

by Gordon Malherbe Hillman

WHEN you feel the breath of the morning wind
And the lure of the morning sun,
Stand out for the trail that is never stale,
Where the tall red schooners run!

When you feel the lilt of the driving surf
And the roar of an eastern breeze,
Trek down the track in a fishing-smack
To the throb of the racing seas!

When you sense the brine in the Autumn air,
And the land seems dry and old,
Go dare the damp in a pitching tramp
And live in her smutty hold!

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ALMOST WHITE

By Henry C Rowland

SALEM TARR, sitting slack-shouldered in his chair, stared down with stony eyes at his untasted drink of "rum and gum." On the other side of the table, "Cheffy," the octoroon mate, narrowly watched his captain's face, and his dog-like devotion seemed to growl at the trouble which he read there.

In the rear of the room the steam-piano clamored blatantly; men and also the female habituées of the place drifted in as the night wore on. There were hands from the snapper-fishing fleet, big-boned Yankees and swarthy Portuguese; there were stevedores and sailors from the lumber-fleet which carried the southern pine to all countries of the world; there were runners and crimps; all of the society of Pensacola's varied waterfront found one level in "Nick's Place."

Some greeted Salem as they passed and, at his cold oblivion, these nudged each other. No one greeted Cheffy; his eighth part of African blood was supposed ethically to bar him from the privileges of even so democratic a resort as the dance-hall of Nicodemus, the Greek, and it was only the unattractive prospect of a quarrel with Salem Tarr which admitted of his presence.

They were an odd pair, the ex-master and mate of the ill-starred fisherman, *July Fourth*. Each was a reversion to type. Salem, with his hatred of Papists and his savage fear of hell, was the reincarnate Puritan hangman of witches. Cheffy was the freakish outcrop of noble qualities dormant through several generations of ancestors. Cheffy's father had been the vicious son of a wicked old British baronet; his mother was "Yaller Kitty," who kept the sweetmeat shop at the "Halfway Tree" near Kingston. Cheffy's typical Jamaican dignity was given weight by the knowledge that his father had been born a British gentleman, and this knowledge was his pride and his curse and decreed for him a life of loneliness.

"I'se almos' white, sar," he would say with dignity. "My fa'der was British gen'leman an' so I carn't mix in wiv low-down folk lak-a-dat!"

An even higher impulse prevented his thrusting in upon the whites, and so he stood apart, grave, high-principled, loyal—a mongrel upheld by traditions of the higher of his mingled castes.

The hall filled rapidly and still Salem sat and stared at his untasted drink, while Cheffy, his own glass untouched, sat offering his silent sympathy. To Cheffy, Salem's warped and rigid bigotries appeared the lofty strength of principles. Once his iron word was passed, Salem would weld it to his actions, although this covenant might shed a pestilence upon the earth. He spoke no word in idleness, and when he cursed it was not vainly but with the vigor of sincerity. His adherence to principle was cruel in its disregard of modifying circumstance, and poor Cheffy, a creature swayed by generous impulse, looked on these traits with hopeless admiration.

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Salem's rigid silence endured; his hard, Puritanic features, strong to the point of cruelty, relaxed no line of their fixity. His small, pale eyes with their minute, black pupils bored straight ahead of him. For many minutes no word had been spoken when suddenly Cheffy leaned forward.

"'Ere 'e come—Billy Trent, Cappen Salem," he said, warningly, in his rich voice with its bizarre negro-cockney accent. "'E kep' you waitin' mighty long time, sar."

Salem's big fist tightened as it lay upon the table, and the muscles of his lean jaw bulged and slackened; the bushy brows drew a straight line across the stony eyes and the seams of his weather-beaten face deepened.

"Good evenin', Cap'n Salem," said a heavy voice at his elbow.

"Evenin'," answered Salem. He looked up slowly. "Set down."

Trent nodded. He laid one thick hand on the mate's shoulder and Cheffy writhed imperceptibly at the contact.

"Evenin', Cheffy," said Trent.

A fine tremor ran through the taut muscles of the octoroon as he returned the greeting. Trent let his burly figure slump down into an empty chair and, at a motion from Salem, the suave Levantine took his order.

"Cheffy give ye my message?" asked Trent in his boatswain's-mate's voice.

"Yes," answered Salem.

He had small love and no respect for this renegade man-of-war's man who had thrust in upon him. Billy Trent had been feared and hated in the Antilles for the twenty years he had infested them, yet he had prospered and was known as a man of real, if ill-got, substance and one who owned many vessels, coasters and fishermen.

Trent gulped at his drink and set down the glass.

"Blarst me if I weren't sorry to hear ye'd lost yer vessel, Salem," said he.

A dull flush of anger crept to Salem's high cheek-bones. He made no answer.

"'Course it weren't no fault o' your'n," continued Trent. "C'llision in a fog is what the law-sharks calls 'hand o' Gawd an' other public enemies.' Ever learn who hit ye, Salem?"

"No," growled Salem. "'Twas at night —some cussed tramp outward bound, I reckon. An' ye'd best not take the name o' God in vain, Billy Trent."

"No insurance?"

"Ever hear tell of insurance on a Pensacoly snapper-fisher?"

Trent shook his head and drummed on the table with his heavy fingers.

"Looky here, Salem," said he; "you an' me ain't never been great pals, but I know ye fer an able skipper and a honest man. I'm a-fittin' out my *Shark* fer a venture, an' if ye want a master's billet it's your'n. If ye'd like Cheffy here fer mate, take 'im along."

Salem looked up quickly and his small, pale eyes fastened upon Trent with a stare of suspicion. A startled look showed in Cheffy's sensitive features and his strong, delicate hands gripped the arms of his chair as he watched Salem's face. For several moments no word was spoken.

"Whar's she goin'?" asked Salem slowly. "Fishin'?"

Trent chuckled deep in his hairy throat. "Gold-fishin', Salem," said he. "I'm makin' another v'y'ge to Darien."

"You a-goin' along?" asked Salem.

"Aye, but that don't interfere with you none. I got other things to keep me busy. Then maybe it might need us both to 'andle the gang I shipped—the hardest mob of sweeps an' convic's ever you see in east or west. Them's the kind fer gold-seekers, Salem—a desp'rit crew that hate heave and ain't afeard o' hell. A precious bad lot, Salem, as ever you see, but any one of 'em 'ud swim through burnin' brimstone for the sight o' gold."

Salem rubbed his chin with his bony knuckles.

"Lay or pay?" he asked.

"Both. Hundred a month, gold, fer you and seventy-five fer the mate, and a lay 'cordin' to fishin'-terms, me ratin' owner, course, and you ratin' skipper."

He leaned across the table and, resting one elbow, wagged a thick forefinger at Salem, while his heavy, pock-marked visage was shoved forward until the straggling beard which covered it was almost in the Yankee's face.

"I'm a-goin' to git that metal this time, my frien'; them Injuns up the river know the way to the mines where the gold come from in the old days fer Cartagena and Panama Viejo!"

He arose abruptly and pushed back his chair.

"Think it over, Cappen Salem. Think it over, an', p'rhaps before the evenin's done

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ye'll have made up yer mind. There's two months' advance fer the both of ye whenever ye say the word. I know ye, Salem, an' all I want is yer word that you an' Cheffy will serve me faithful an' obey my orders."

Trent nodded and walked to the rear of the room. For several minutes Salem sat in silence, staring fixedly at the table while his mate watched him in patient anxiety. Presently he looked up.

"What d'ye think, Cheffy?" he asked.

The octoroon wrinkled his broad, smooth forehead.

"Don't lak it, sar," he answered. "Cheffy don' lak dis plan. Don't lak Billy Trent; 'e mighty bad mon. Once 'e steal um dey Dominican womans an' sell um for slave in Gonaives."

"Yes, yes," snapped Salem, "I know all o' that. He's a desp'rit bad lot, Billy Trent. He's been twice in the calaboose fer strippin' wrecks in the Bahamas, an' he stole pearls in Margarita, an' shanghaied a gang o' San Blas Injuns, an' carried a cargo o' Recidivists from Cayenne an' turned 'em loose in Demerara. He can't land in Venezuela an' he's been spat out o' Jamaica and kicked out o' Panama. 'Twon't be long before he can't land nowhere, but it's that or the beach, Cheffy—that or the beach," and Salem cursed with savage sincerity the unknown hand which had sunk his schooner and his fortunes with her.

Cheffy nodded.

"Right yo' is, Cap'n Salem, right yo' is. Pensacola, she mighty bad place for um busted sailormon!"

"We're flat broke, Cheffy," growled Salem. "All o' my savin's went down in the schooner, an' there's more folks in this town would like to do us ill than good. S'pose we ship along with Billy Trent; it's just a matter o' lickin' into shape them convic's he's shipped, an' mebbe a touch o' Chagres fever. 'Tain't like wreckin' or slavin' or some onlawful doin's."

Cheffy shook his head.

"Dat Billy Trent 'e mighty bad mon, sar. Cheffy mistrust dere goin' be some debiltry which ever Billy Trent 'e go for do. S'pose you ship wiv Billy Trent, sar, an 'e wan' for mak some badness? Whaffor you carn't tell 'em no; you hones' man."

Salem stared at the table and his thin, straight lips tightened. Cheffy's reasonable words had only served to stir his hard, uncompromising principles.

"No, Cheffy," said he. "Once I give my word to Billy Trent to sarve him faithful and once I stow his money in my pocket, I am bound to him through thick an' thin." His face grew stern. "'Tain't right, I know, to work fer no such son o' Belial, but we're druv to it, Cheffy, we're druv to it. We hev been smitten hip an' thigh, as the Gospel says, 'n' our substance wasted, 'n' that through no fault o' our'n." His features stiffened. "We'll sign on fer this v'y'ge, Cheffy," said he slowly, "come what may of it."

A shadow crossed Cheffy's soft features; it slipped away at once and he nodded cheerfully at his skipper.

"Dat we will, Cap'n Salem," he agreed cheerfully. "Carn't sit still on de beach all day a-watchin' de pelicans, dat we carn't."

THE schooner *Shark* of tarnished reputation was lying at anchor well offshore and out of hail of neighboring vessels. Astern of her a seine-boat floated at the end of a long painter and, as Salem, followed by Cheffy, set foot on her unclean decks littered with loose gear, they saw that she was fairly overrun by the ill-set mob gathered by Billy Trent for his venture. There were jail-breakers from the penal colonies, runaways from foreign vessels, gold-thieves from the Mazaruni in demand by the colonial governments of the British West Indies. There were men who had shown false lights and cut throats on the sand-spits of the Bahamas; also there were bad men who had drifted in from the Southwest where, for their ill deeds, the hands of all were turned against them.

Salem's trained eye at once picked out the lack of skilled sailormen among the rabble, and the corners of his thin lips curled in contempt. The scum of the sea he held to be hard and acrid through no great fault of its own, but for the scum of the land he had scant charity.

As he stepped upon the deck those nearest glanced at him indifferently, and then looked at Cheffy with the hostile contempt which those low in the human scale offer to any man held to be still lower. Trent was not in sight, but, as Salem stood looking about him, his burly figure appeared in the companionway. He nodded to Salem; then strode to the corner of the deck-house and

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rapped heavily for silence with the knuckles of his heavy fist.

"Boys," said he to the listening men, "this 'ere is Capt'n Tarr an' 'is mate." He jerked his head toward the two. "Cap'n Tarr is master o' this 'ere vessel."

"The —— he is!" muttered a voice from the group upon the quarter-deck.

Trent scowled.

"Ye've signed on this 'ere schooner fer a v'y'ge to look fer gold," he continued, "an' we're all on lay here, but just the same we got to have disciplyne."

"The —— we have!" replied the same soft, ironic voice.

Salem, turning slowly, inquired its source with stony eyes. A swarthy flush appeared upon Trent's bloated face. He turned glowering toward the voice.

"Let me warn ye," said he, "to obey orders an' not to look fer no trouble, 'cuz if ye do ye'll find a-plenty!"

There was no answer, but there came from the group of men a sullen murmur. Trent scowled, then strode toward the companionway and disappeared below.

Salem looked slowly about him and those nearest edged away from the scrutiny of the small, pale eyes with their gimlet pupils. Salem's lip curled in contempt as he turned to Cheffy.

"D'ye reckon there's any sailormen amongst this bunch o' bums and hoboes?" he asked in a loud, scornful voice.

Cheffy did not reply. He was not afraid, but his sensitive nature shrank from this blatant insult. His instincts were propitiatory where Salem's were aggressive. The harsh, jarring voice had silenced the gabble on the quarter-deck, and, in the pause, a man lounged slowly forward. He was tall, broad, sinewy, with the shoulders of a smith and the lithe body of an Apache. There was a furrow on one tanned cheek and a shifting glint in his gray-green eye. In front of Salem he stopped and swayed slightly forward, his weight all on the balls of his feet.

"Who the —— are you," he drawled, and there was a homicidal lilt in the lazy voice, "who don't care fer this yer bunch and comments on the same so light and free?"

His mates gathered behind him, and so they stood for a moment of portentous silence, while Salem stared upon them stonily. His great arms were hanging loose; in his posture there was no warning of the animal quickness latent in the heavy bone and muscle, and so his adversary, tense beneath his calm, stood unprepared for that which followed.

Without a tremor of the massive frame, without the warning twitch of a muscle in face or body or the slightest shift of balance, Salem's iron arm shot out, quick as a lick of flame, and the weight of his scant two hundred pounds crashed full upon the jaw of his antagonist. The man spun across the deck, struck the heavy bulwarks and fell motionless. Salem's arm fell. Silent as before, he stared at the others.

"Get off the quarter-deck!" he ordered.

The men paused and the next instant Salem was among them, and the impact of the clean, cruel blows smacked out above the uproar. Cheffy sprang to his shoulder and between them they drove the rabble forward and into the waist.

The schooner was of the old type, with raised poop and forecastle. Salem and Cheffy walked to the break and looked down upon the swarm beneath. Curse and query were flying from lip to lip.

"Oo are yeou up there, so free with yer fistes?" howled a man with a bleeding face. Salem smiled sardonically.

"Wa'al," he answered, "I'm the skipper. Don't ye think I act like it?"

He glanced over his shoulder as a bulky figure hove up through the cabin companionway.

"I'm takin' charge o' yer vessel, Billy Trent," said he with a grin.

Trent hooked his thumbs into his belt, walked to the break of the quarter-deck and leered down upon his crew. A laugh rumbled up from his deep chest. His sleeves were rolled above his elbows and the great arms bulged with heavy muscles. His straggling beard grew down unbroken from his pock-marked jaws and passed out of sight beneath the V-shaped opening of his flannel shirt. There were ink smears upon his loose lower lip and blue-black smudges on the fingers of one hand.

"Didn't think ye'd need no 'elp, Salem," said he, and again his brutal laugh welled up. Cheffy, standing at his elbow, shrank back as he had not shrunk from the mob.

"That's right," continued Trent; "put the fear o' Gawd into the 'earts o' the dogs!"

"Hold on there, Billy;" whined a complaining voice, "we shipped under youa n we ain't workin' fer no bucko square-rigger

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We ain't fo'castle hands; we be pardners workin' on lay, an' some of us is bunkin' aft."

"Then some o' ye will be bunkin' overside, I reckon, if I ketch ye on this quarterdeck ag'in!" said Salem grimly.

The words were followed by a pause.

"Then if that's the game, Billy, we'll thank ye to set us on the beach agen!" called an angry voice.

The others took up the chorus, combining threat and pleading, and all the while they edged closer and closer toward the feet of the three men above them. Salem saw it, and the muscles of his grim face grew hard. Lurid fires glowed deep in Cheffy's eyes and Trent's leering smile writhed into a savage grin.

"Too late now, boys," said he. "Ye'd best do as ye're bid an' keep yer mouths shut!"

A little cockney, escaped from a British ship where he had knifed the mate, sprang forward.

"Come on, lads!" he screeched. "This 'ere's all a gyme! We been had, we 'ave! We been shanghaied like any other bloomink dopes! Let's bash their ugly 'eads an' go ashore!"

"Come on, then, if ye must have it, blarst ye!" snarled Trent.

The next instant the crew was upon them and there was a maelstrom of furious fighting. The heavy blows of Trent and Salem drove them back for a moment and, before they could return to the attack, Salem had whipped up an oar from the deck-house, broken the stout ash across his knee and, gripping the butt end, he swept in amongst the mutineers, driving them down the hatches, up the rigging and even overboard in their panic.

Salem leaned against a boat and wiped the blood and sweat from his eyes. Near him Billy Trent was clinging to the shrouds, coughing violently, for in the thick of the fight a man had struck him across the chest with an iron windlass-brake and for days this cough clung to him when he raised his voice above a whisper. Cheffy, cut about the mouth and forehead, stood cheerfully alert, his eyes upon his master.

Salem glanced doubtfully at the prone figures of such as had come within the swing of his club.

"Best fly a police flag, Billy," said he. "Reckon thar may be trouble fer this when we hit the beach ag'in!"

Trent coughed; then grinned at Salem over his shoulder.

"There won't be no trouble, Salem. Hevery man jack o' this mob is wanted on 'is own 'ook a'ready. They won't carry no tales."

He coughed violently.

For a while they rested. Presently Salem looked aloft at the terrified figures clinging dumbly in the rigging, then forward to a knot of men clustered in the bow; from some of these the water was dripping. All were watching him fearsomely and in silence. He threw back his head and laughed.

"H'ist the mains'l!" he bellowed; then laughed again as the men came slinking aft to carry out his order.

THE *Shark* drifted slowly up the mouth of the tropic river. On the western bank the fringe of palms threw long shadows as the lurid sun sank lower. Schools of fish rippled the surface of the oily water and the pelicans were diving among them like heavy darts.

Opposite an Indian village where the fresh green of the bananas shone vividly beneath the darker green of the palms, the anchor splashed over the bow and set the white herons to squawking in the mangroves. From the beach a cluster of natives eyed the schooner doubtfully, until, caution overcome by curiosity, they slipped into their long canoes and paddled out to reconnoiter.

Below, in his stifling cabin, Billy Trent, clad only in pajamas, pored over a crude chart which he smudged with his damp fingers, while he coughed and cursed the humid heat. Opposite him Salem Tarr traced with a pen the course of a winding river.

"Up 'ere," said Trent, blotting out the spot with his thick forefinger, "is the village wot the feller tells of, an' them Injuns livin' there knows the way to them old diggin's."

A gleam of avarice shone from Salem's eyes.

"The ancient mines o' Darien!" said he. "'The wealth of Ophir and of Ind!'"

Trent grinned.

"Jus' so. The mines as made old Panama the richest city o' the Western Hemisphere an' kep' a fleet o' galley-ships a-freightin' the gold from Cartagena to Cadiz!"

"S'ppose them Injuns is onfriendly?" queried Salem.

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"None o' them 'ere Injuns on the Isthmus is dangerous," said Trent contemptuously.

"But s'ppose they balk at leadin' us to the mines?" Salem persisted. "Sometimes natyves 'e hard to move."

Trent swore and finished in a fit of coughing.

"There's ways o' makin' 'em move!" he growled.

Salem's face darkened.

"I'll stand fer no torturin' o' natyves, if that's yer game, Billy Trent," said he with a scowl.

Trent hove himself on to his feet and, resting his knuckles on the table, glared across at Salem.

" 'Ow's this?" he snarled. " 'Ave I been mistook? Ain't you a man o' yer word arter all? Ain't ye took my money an' passed yer word to obey my orders—you an' yer nigger mate? Wot's this rot about you standin' fer this an' that? Ain't yer promise good?"

Salem's jaws set grimly, but he dropped his eyes.

"I didn't count on no torturin' o' natyves, Billy Trent," he muttered.

A flash of triumph lit Trent's bleared eyes.

"Nor me neither—nor am I countin' on it now." His voice sank to a hoarse whisper so that he might talk without the interruption of the racking cough. "I hev come t' git that gold, Salem, an' git it I will, fair means 'r foul. You took my money, Salem Tarr, an' ye pledged me yer word to back me up—you an' yer mate, Cheffy. I look fer ye to keep that promise, Cap'n Salem Tarr!"

Salem looked slowly up and his face was the face of a death-mask.

"I'll keep my promise to ye, Billy Trent," he answered.

FROM the moment when the long seine-boat rounded the bend of the river and came upon the village, cooling itself in the shadow of the western bank, the reign of terror had begun. Trent, convinced that the tribe possessed the secret of the ancient mines and fearful that, if given time, they might recruit a hostile force, had seized as many as he could and placed them under guard. Then, with a sidelong glance at Salem, he had introduced hot iron as a factor in the game, and the parrots in the tree-tops screamed back in answer to the screams arising from the village.

Day after day these inquisitions held their sickening sessions. Billy Trent, lounging on the matting in the doorway of the chief's house, spoke through his interpreter with each sullen prisoner led from the barracoon.

In a circle, eyes avid for the spectacle, lounged his savage following, while opposite, straight upon his feet, arms folded upon his chest, stood Salem Tarr, and his face was the face of a Puritanic ancestor watching the hanging of a witch in Salem town. If compassion fought with his steel-bound sense of duty, it left no record in the fixed lines of his face; the cries of the victim awakened no response in him, not even the flicker of an eyelid nor the quiver of a muscle, yet, if one had laid a hand upon his bulging forearm, he would have found it tense as the forestay of the *Shark*.

Cheffy alone of all the crew had shunned these inquests. When they had first been made plain to him, his dusky eyes had turned to Salem in wild alarm and had been met by a stony stare, inscrutable as the drab face of a rock. Then, dropping his head, Cheffy had slunk away. Shuddering and stealing along the river-bank, he had crept into the cane where he crouched shivering, his fingers in his ears to shut out the horrid sounds. There Salem had found him.

"Cap'n Salem, Cap'n Salem," whimpered Cheffy, "whaffor you let um mak dis debbil wark? You white mon, sar, an' carn't lak for see um Injun torture' so!"

Salem swore fiercely and spat upon the sand.

"I'd give ten year o' my life to be free to stop it, Cheffy!"

The mate's eyes glowed; he sprang to his feet and stood chest out, head up; and the expression of his sensitive features was for the moment that of some Anglo-Saxon ancestor who scents strife and hungers for it.

"Den we stop it quick, sar! 'Cheffy, 'e no 'fraid fight! 'E no 'fraid fight um Billy Trent an' all 'is ban', sar! My farder was British gen'leman. I's almos' white, sar! I no 'fraid fight all dese bad mons, but carn't see um poor Injun torture'!"

Salem laughed bitterly and at the sound Cheffy drooped.

"Ye don't think I'm abidin' the work o' these hell-hounds from fear?" cried Salem, savagely. "Ye know me better 'n that,

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matey. It's becuz Trent has got my promise—my promise fer both of us to sarve him faithful an' obey his orders! I give him my word—my sacred word for you an' me, —— his soul to ——!"

Cheffy's eyes kindled; he sprang to Salem's side and laid his beautifully shaped hand upon the captain's iron arm. His eyes sought Salem's appealingly.

"You Christian mon, sar! S'ppose you did gib yor wor'rd to Billy Trent, it heap better burst um promise dan see pore Injun torture—see um pore womans suffer lak-a-dat!"

His voice was that of the frantic postulant. Salem shook him off with an oath.

"You can't see it, Cheffy," said he in a stern voice. "Ye may be almost white but ye ain't all white at that. First and foremost a God-fearin' white man has got to keep his word." His voice was cold as ice. "My word is passed fer you as well as me, Cheffy, an' should ye break it, then ye drag me down as a liar to your own level. See to it that ye don't do that, Cheffy!"

And Cheffy, ashamed of his eighth part of African blood which had tempted him, he feared, from the path of this rigid principle, cast down his eyes and followed at his master's heel.

THERE came a time when Trent, furious at the obstinacy of his prisoners, carried his inquisition to a point where the victim panted out his life upon the ground.

A grayness settled on Salem's inscrutable features, and the jeers of the crew, maddened by the lust of loot, were silenced. Trent alone hung upon his deed with fiendish relish. Bilious with unslaked avarice, maddened by the gnawing pain of his hidden wound, the savage protest which he read in Salem's face had leavened him with a growing hatred of the Yankee, until, at times, it rose to set him coughing and spitting like a cat. And then one day he stumbled on a handle for this hate. He rolled his bloodshot eyes to Salem.

"Where is yer nigger mate?" he growled.

Salem shrugged his massive shoulders. He alone knew the true cause of Cheffy's absence, but Trent, with diabolic cunning, guessed the secret. His loose lips twisted into a savage grin.

"Go git 'im!" he snarled.

Silently and with lips compressed Salem left the circle. He found his mate hidden in the cane, his fingers in his ears, his soft eyes fixed yearningly upon the yellow river flowing sluggishly toward the sea.

"Come out, Cheffy!" Salem bade him sternly. The octoroon crept shivering from his lair. Tremors ran through his limbs.

"Trent wants you," said Salem.

Cheffy threw out both hands to him.

"Cheffy carn't go, sar!" he cried. "Cheffy carn't go!"

His keen animal instinct warned him of the service which Trent must require.

Salem scowled.

"Keep your word Cheffy—and mine!"

The mate writhed.

"I'se ill, sar!" he cried. "I has fever, sar!"

"Ava'ast there, Cheffy," said Salem, roughly. "Lyin' lips are abomination to the Lord!" His nasal voice rolled sonorously.

Cheffy wrung his slim hands.

"Carn't go for do lak-a-dat, sar!" he cried. "Cheffy carn't do dis t'ing!"

"Come," said Salem, "be a man!"

The octoroon drew himself up.

"Cheffy got um strong 'eart, sar. No 'fraid to fight—no 'fraid ob Billy Trent an' his ban', but Cheffy farder British gen'leman, sar, an' so I carn't do dis debbil wa-ark!"

Pity and a certain cold sympathy shone from Salem's eyes.

"You're right, Cheffy," said he, "'tis devil's work and is bound to reap hell's payment. 'As ye sow, even so shall ye reap,' the Gospel says, but my word is passed to Billy Trent, I've taken his wage an' am bound to do his will even in the face o' God's wrath. Only fer that and there ud not be gold enough on the whole Isthmus to pay me fer one hour o' sich sarvice!"

He nodded to Cheffy and turned upon his heel, and the mate, still shaken by spasms of shivering, followed like a recreant dog. They passed through the bananas and crossed an open space where the blasting heat lay in shimmering waves as the noonday sun beat down through the breathless air. The silence of abandonment lay on the place, the midday silence of the tropic, deep as the midnight silence of the frozen north—this silence of stifling, suffocating heat marked by a pause in the jungle's daily life, when bird and beast and insect plunge deep into the damp shadow

Across the clearing, under the high shade

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of the nut-palms, Trent sat waiting, his men stretched like dogs, panting and cursing, for no draft of air stirred in the river-bottom. Trent roused himself as Salem, followed by Cheffy, appeared on the edge of the bananas, and a grin writhed upon his wicked lips. Cheffy looked fearfully at the victim lying bound beside the fire which burned with colorless flame in the yellow blaze of the sunlight. A spasm of shivering shook him from head to foot.

"Give the iron to the nigger!"

Trent spoke in the hoarse whisper which his voice had become. One of the men picked up the heated iron in a strip of matting and thrust it upon Cheffy. The mate took it and turned his appealing eyes to Salem and, hardened as the man was and fixed in his rigid principles, he turned to Trent with passionate protest.

"Looky here, Billy Trent," he cried, throwing out one arm, "me and Cheffy hev kept 'r promise and sarved ye faithful 'n' obeyed all yer orders! Ye know well, —— —— ye, that only fer my word I'd see ye forty fathom deep in —— before I'd stood fer this! I warn ye, Billy Trent, I warn ye!"

He raised his hand and his deep voice grew sonorous, prophetic.

"I warn ye not to put this job on honest men. Ye're a sick man, Billy Trent, an' fer all you know ye're a dyin' man. Yer timbers was stove an' yer strength is failin' day by day. Think on yer blackened soul, Billy Trent, an' give over these here devilish doin's an' repent while yet ye may—" his voice sank as he quoted the scriptural warning—" 'lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer while his heart is hot!' "

His deep voice ebbed and sank. Cheffy, his sensitively sympathetic soul exalted at the prophetic words, cast his earnest eyes on Trent, the heated gun-barrel scorching his hand unfelt. There was an instant's pause while Trent fought with the heat for the voice to sound his blasphemies. Muttering in husky-throated whispers, he turned his flaming eyes to the octoroon.

"Git to work!" he snarled, gulping back the cough.

Cheffy's head slid forward on his shoulders as he glared back at this creature whom he feared and loathed.

"Don't crowd me, Cap'n Trent!" he cried wildly, and a mad light began to kindle in the depths of his colorless eyes. "Don' you crowd a mon der lak-a-dat! I'se almos' white, Cap'n Trent. Cheffy almos' white!"

The sweat poured from his ashen face and his delicate nostrils dilated. A hush fell upon the men. Trent broke into cursing.

"Git to work, ye yaller sweep!"

Cheffy rolled his frenzied eyes to Salem; he glared about him crazedly; his firmament was falling, nor was there left one fixed star by which he might set his course. His eyes wandered back to his persecutor, and then, with a sob which ended in a roar, he sprang like a jaguar on Billy Trent and, with one fearful blow, sent the blackened soul speeding on the path of its victims.

DOWN with the sluggish current dropped the seine-boat, her crew pulling fitfully as the spirit seized them. In the stern, steering-oar in hand, sat Salem Tarr, and his face was the face of one degraded of his God.

Cheffy was huddled in the bow, the sun beating upon his head, which was bowed in the clasp of his slender hands. Sometimes dry sobs arose to rack his recumbent figure, but these were soundless. Apart from him the others huddled in silence under the hot shade of an awning.

They drifted down, the planks of the boat warping and blistering in the cruel heat. Once Cheffy raised his head and looked long and yearningly at the uncompromising visage of the man who had been the only friend whom his lonely life had known. This dumb inquiry was such as might be given a master by a dog who has done an unwitting wrong.

Down they went in silence and the flaming heat of the river-bed. When the topmasts of the schooner were raised above the mangroves, Cheffy attempted speech.

"Cheffy was mad, sar. Cheffy don' know what he mak. Cheffy almos' white, sar, an' carn't see pore Injuns torture'."

"Keep still, curse ye!" growled Salem, through tight-set lips. "How hev ye kep' the word I passed fer both of us? How hev ye repaid the trust I put in ye?" His rough voice lost a shade of its harshness. "Ye're almost white, Cheffy, but ye ain't all white at that. The nigger blood is thar to rise ag'in' ye! Henceforth ye'd best not try to herd with clean an' honest men!"

Cheffy bowed his head.

"I'se almos' white. I'se almos' white," he sobbed with the monotonous insistence of a child. "Cheffy almos' white."

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EVIDENTLY NOT

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Local Option in Loco Land," "Pirates from Piperock," etc.

"ANYWAY, I don't believe it, 'Magpie'," says I, and that starts an argument.

It don't take much for me and that long-complected cow-trailer to start an argument. All that one of us has got to do is to say, "I don't think so," and the stuff is all off, 'cause the other one does think so and he's right there when it comes to telling why.

Magpie Simpkins pulls his bronc across the trail and proceeds to make a cigaret while he ponders on the proper procedure to make me disagree with myself.

We're in a strange land, me and Magpie. We've been away over in the Buffalo Basin country, where some misguided *hombre* said there was gold. It had been told to us thusly—

"They say there is gold in the Buffalo Basin."

Just "they" was the only authority, which don't give you nobody in particular to kill off for lying, but me and Magpie are willing to hold up our right hands and swear, to the best of our ability, that "they" lied.

Punching a pack-train of burros is slow going, so we traded our long-eared rolling-stock for a couple of broncs and saddles, and here we are cutting across the State, aiming to hit Yaller Rock County eventually.

"You're wrong, Ike," says Magpie after his smoke is going good. "Circumstantial evidence is as good or as bad as any other kind. If it wasn't for circumstantial evidence we wouldn't need a penitentiary—especially out here, where mostly every man who is arrested is guilty of something. Maybe he ain't guilty of what he's charged with, Ike, but he's plenty guilty of something just as bad. It ain't noways possible for every crime to have a witness and you can't acquit a feller just because he sneaked up on his criminal occupation in the dark when everybody was in bed."

"Just the same, I don't believe in it," says I. "I don't believe in putting a feller behind the bars just because he can't prove he's innocent. Sometimes, Magpie, things figure out so a feller just can't prove things, and he ought to have the benefit of the doubt."

"Feller men should be circumspect," says Magpie wise-like.

I don't know what he means and I'm danged sure he don't.

"Each and every man's life should be a open book for all to read. No man should ever be placed in a position where he can't explain the what and whyfor of every little minute of his life. Skulduggery and deception pilgrim hand in hand."

"Well," says I, "you brings in words that astounds me, and I can't say much in reply to things I don't savvy, but down deep into me heart, liver and lights, Magpie, I know you're crazy, but——"

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"There ain't no 'buts', Ike. If every man lived free and open——"

Zing!

Magpie's saddle-horn is just plain steel, never having been covered with leather, and that bullet skipped off that bare knob and sings sweet-like off into the brush. Then cometh the pop of the rifle. Me and Magpie sets there and looks at that saddle-horn.

"Somebody shooting at coyotes," opines Magpie. "Wild bullet."

"I don't think so," says I. "I think that somebody——"

"Now, Ike, it ain't reasonable to suppose that anybody——"

Splut!

A slug cuts right past my hip and tears a sizable hole in the cantle of my saddle. I falls right off that bronc and sets down in the brush, and Magpie follers me.

"There goes your old argument," says I. "I was right."

"Not necessarily, Ike. There might 'a' been two coyotes."

Can you beat that? Even when another bullet seeps into the mesquite he ain't convinced. Me and him are heeled with six-guns, but they ain't much use against rifles.

"You argues in favor of circumstantial evidence, Magpie, and when said evidence presents itself you deny it."

"Yeah? How about you, Ike? You don't believe it, but you hops on to a chance to use it at the lightest opportunity."

"I ain't hopping on to nothing! I don't need to be shot at more than twice before I gets a hunch that I'm excess meat in this vale of tears."

"Pshaw! You're finicky, Ike. Maybe them bullets wasn't noways——"

"Just lay them guns on the earth and reach for a cloud," says a soft voice, and we stops our argument.

There's four of 'em, and every way we looks we're staring down the muzzle of a rifle. One of them fellers is wearing a star, but she ain't the star of hope for us. He hands out a pair of handcuffs and they seems to fit us fine. Then they makes us get on to our broncs and leads us away.

"We'll sneak into town from the far side," says the sheriff. "We sure got to go easy-like, boys, 'cause they're watching for us."

"We thought you was shooting at coyotes," says Magpie.

"You're a danged good guesser, feller," says the sheriff, and that's all that was said.

It was enough. They takes us off our broncs out behind a barn and then they eases us behind fences and sheds until they slams us into a 'dobe jail.

"Nobody seen us," grins the sheriff, "and it's a danged good thing, 'cause if the bunch knowed we had 'em in here they'd paw this here jail all to pieces."

"Not wishing to be inquisitive," says Magpie, "but I'd admire to know why you puts us in here?"

"Reckon you need telling?" asks the sheriff mean-like.

"Feller kinda likes to know," admits Magpie.

"Well, being as you two has likely committed so may crimes that you has to find out which one you're jailed for, I'll tell you that you're in jail for robbing the Greasewood bank and shooting the cashier. *Sabe?* Now you better lay low until we can take you to War Bonnet, 'cause this here jail won't stand no rough use. The sentiment runs to necktie parties, 'cause that cashier was popular."

"Ain't you afraid they'll get out, Zeb?" asks one of them. "Maybe some of us better stay and look out for 'em."

"Nope. We don't want nobody to suspicion they're here. *Sabe?* We'll all ride away again and show up here after dark without no prisoners. They'll have the road to War Bonnet watched, but as soon as they hear we didn't have no luck they'll come in." And then he turns to us. "You fellers ain't got a chance in the world if you do get out. You'd just about—Say, I got a scheme. Take off your clothes."

"Our clothes?" asks Magpie foolish-like.

"Yeah. Hand 'em out to me. I reckon you won't get loose none to speak about."

What could we do? We undresses and gives them our clothes, and when they locks the outside door me and Magpie Simpkins are as bare as the day we came into this life of few years and full of trouble. Me and Magpie sets there and gawps at each other.

"Venice," says Magpie. "How is all the little Milos?"

"Tolable, Godiva, tolable."

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WE SETS there and stares into space for a while.

"You ought to be satisfied with the evidence," says I. "It ain't noways possible for every crime to have a witness, and——"

"Pshaw, they ain't got nothing to hold us on, Ike."

"Nope. Me and you are foolish to stay here. Being a open book, so to speak, you ought to read 'em a few paragraphs, Magpie."

"Sh-h-h-h!"

We hugs the wall of the cell and listens to some folks talking.

"Well, they ain't caught 'em yet, that's a cinch. The sheriff will just about ride seventeen broncs to death and catch nobody."

"Uh-huh. Nobody seen 'em? Nobody got any idea where they went?"

"Nope. Old man Stivers walks into the bank and finds Abe Walters laying on the floor. Whole danged town was asleep, I reckon. Believe me, the law won't deal with this case. Everybody liked Abe."

Their voices fades away and me and Magpie sighs deep-like.

"I—I wish I had a cigaret," says Magpie. "I'm going to kill that sheriff for taking my tobacco and papers."

We sets there out of range of that window and watches night come along. As soon as it gets dark Magpie begins to vesticate around. The bottom of the one little window is about six feet from the floor and is guarded with four bars.

Magpie yanks the bunk under it and climbs up. Pretty soon he begins to laugh.

"No wonder that sheriff handicaps us, Ike. These bars are only stuck into the 'dobe mud."

He yanks and grunts for a while and then hops down. "Liberty confronts us, Ike. Let's be going."

"Not me, Magpie. I may look well in the nude in a jail, but I sure ain't going to mingle in no society like this. Do all the libertying you desire, old-timer, but excuse me. Good luck to you."

"You mean you're going to stick here and get hung?"

"I mean that I stays here; the hanging is a future consideration."

Magpie spits on his hands and seems to consider the height of the window.

"Well, give me a boost then," says I. "I ain't as tall as you are."

That blasted window was made for small men to escape out of—men who ain't bowlegged. I lost skin off both sides of me when I squeezed through, and when I hit the earth I'm in a cactus patch. Magpie slides through and lit setting down.

"——!" he snorts. "Why didn't you tell me about them cactus?"

"I didn't think there was any left, Magpie, except what's in me."

We sneaked around a corner of the street and almost runs into a big building which is all lit up. We can hear somebody orating loud and clear.

"Sunday night, Ike!" grunts Magpie, "What luck!"

"Go to church if you want to, Magpie. I won't."

He mumbles something about fools, as he climbs over a fence, and I climbs over with him.

"What's the main idea?" I asks as we lean up against a house.

"Ike, it's reasonable to suppose that men live in houses, ain't it? Ain't it reasonable to suppose that they might have more clothes than they've got on? I'm going to get clothes."

I'm no burglar. Neither is Magpie, for that matter, but nobody ever done a better job. The window was nailed down, so we smashed it out. Ever get into a strange house in the dark? Don't do it! Take chances on the penitentiary and pack a lantern.

We opened the first door we felt—and stepped off into the cellar.

"Looking for preserved pants?" I asks, feeling for busted bones.

"Ike, you'd seem comical if I hadn't hit my head on the spud-bin."

Then we crawled back up-stairs and explored a while.

"This is the dangest mixed-up house I ever seen!" grunts Magpie, pawing around the knob of a door.

"Pete!" snaps a female voice. "Pete Bowers, you're drunk again, ain't you? Too drunk to talk, eh? Sunday night, too, of all nights! I've got a notion to take a club to you!"

"Yash'm," mutters Magpie backing into me.

"Don't you 'yash'm' me! You undress and get into this bed or I'll come out there and take you apart!"

We stands still for a whole minute and then hears her yawn.

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"Ho-hum-m-m-m!" Then the bed squeaks as she gets up. "Well, I reckon I've got to undress you, you drunken pup!"

And she strikes a match!

Yes, we went some. Ever try running in a strange house in the dark? Any old time I feel like running again, I'll pick a sixty-acre field in the middle of the day—and it won't be even a cloudy day. I led the procession. Lucky for us I found a door, but unlucky for us it was the cellar door again.

When we got through pawing each other around the place, Magpie wrenched a rocking-chair off my neck and used it to bust out the little window. We don't no more than get over the fence when we hears that gentle housewife's voice again.

"Go ahead! Don't mind me, Pete. Go way off where you've got plenty of room to stagger around. Ho-hum-m-m-m! That's what alkyhol does to a he-human, I reckon." And we hears her shut the window.

"Gosh!" gasps Magpie unhooking a tin can off his toes. "I hates to be glad over a man's misfortune, but I'm glad Pete drinks."

"There's circumstantial evidence for you, Magpie. Pete will likely come home sober and get —— whaled out of him for getting drunk and busting up the furniture."

"As I said before, Ike, a man may not be guilty as charged, but he's guilty of something just as bad. Pete must be guilty of drinking or she'd never mistake us for him. See how it works?"

"Maybe he don't always bust up furniture, Magpie."

"To that argument, Ike, I will say this: They've got so danged much furniture that she won't never miss a few chairs or a sofy or two."

"Let's go back to the nice little jail, Magpie," I suggests. "I ain't worth a dang undressed. The shades of night may be drawn, but just the same my conscience bothers me. You can boost me in——"

"Yeah, like ——! Want to get lynched?"

"Well, I'd at least be dying with my pants on. Somebody is going to kill us pretty soon anyway."

"Keep your nerve, Ike. Nerves will win."

"Nerve ain't no good when you ain't got no pants. I'd fight a buzz-saw when I'm dressed, Magpie, but this Adam and Eve business saps my nervous system until she don't register a spark. Where are we headed for now?"

"After something to give you courage, dang you! I'm tired of hearing you kick. Dang the man who throws loose cans around! How in thunder do you miss 'em, Ike?"

"Walking in your footsteps, Magpie. Your feet are so darn big that I has a clear trail."

I FOLLERED him over another fence and to the side of another house. This time the window was loose, and we slides inside. For fear of another cellar door we crawls this time. Magpie finds a bureau with matches on it, so we pulls down the shade and lights a lamp. There didn't seem to be a soul in the house. Magpie rustled into a closet and comes out with a suit of clothes. He didn't tell me it was the only suit in the place; he just holds her up and asks me if I'll wear it.

"Not me," says I, "I'd never make a good preacher, 'cause I'm so bow-legged that the devil could get behind me without going around."

That suit was made for a short *hombre* who wears a forty-eight coat. Magpie has plenty of room in a thirty-eight and has the longest legs in Montana. He got into that layout and then stands out in the middle of the room while I lays on the bed and sobs like a baby. Honest to grandma, I never seen anything like him! He's got one of them flat-topped black hats, a collar that hooks in the back and that long loose black coat and them pants that hit him between the knee and the ankle. He made the shoes fit by cutting holes for his big toes.

He looks at me pious-like and says—"Brother, ain't you going to cover up your shame?"

I wipes the tears out of my eyes and hunts for something to wear. I sure went through everything, but all I can find in man's clothes is a pair of them elastic-topped shoes with the rubber wore out. Magpie sets down in a chair and watches me hunt.

"Dang your hide, help me, can't you?" I yelps. "I've got to have something to wear, ain't I?"

"Yes," says he, "I'd opine you have, and it looks like skirts."

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"Like ——! How would I look in skirts? Not for me!"

"Ike, that church will soon be out and then we'll have to fight our way loose. You—get—into—them—skirts! *Sabe!*"

"Well, dang you, Magpie, give me help!"

"I don't know a thing about 'em, Ike."

"You can button me up, can't you?" I yelled. "Don't act so uppish! Do I put on the straight-jacket first or don't I?"

"You'll make a —— of a looking woman, Ike. Your whiskers are two inches long."

"They are," says I, cinching myself into the thing, "but I'd rather be a bearded lady than a nude corpse. I'll find something to put over my face until I get killed or find a razor."

I gets into everything that seemed to have an entrance and buttons, while Magpie sets there and cries on his own bosom. My dress was white, with pink flowers on it, and the sleeves only comes to my elbows.

I found a pair of green stockings and managed to squeeze my feet into that pair of elastic-topped shoes. Then I got a hat. Man, that was some war-bonnet. It's got some red roses on it and right up the front rears the wing of a dove. It sets fine on the back of my head. Then I found some stuff to drape over my face.

Magpie digs into the bureau and finds two six-guns. He hangs one in the tail of his coat while I shoves the other into the bosom of my dress.

"Now, suppose somebody sees us going away, Magpie," says I. "Don't you reckon they'll wonder where we're going?"

"More than likely. We may have to shoot our way loose, Ike. Reckon we'll take them two empty valises over there, so she'll look like we was going some place. They're empty but locked, so we'll just take 'em along to make the play good."

Now I don't want you folks to think that me and Magpie didn't have no morals. There is some things you have to do, but that ain't no reason why you can't square it later on.

We shut the window and went to the front door.

"We'll walk right out like we owned the shanty," says Magpie, but just as he reached for the knob somebody knocked. I reached for my bosom, but Magpie just turned the knob and opened the door.

"Ah, Reverend—" says a soft voice and I sees two men on the steps, and they've got their hats in their hands.

"Reverend, we-all is from War Bonnet. *Sabe?* War Bonnet has delegated us to come up here and offer to double any ante that Greasewood has made you-all. We comes to hire you out at your own salary. Is you receptive?"

"There's more sinners in War Bonnet than ever dared to hive up here," squeaks the other feller. "You'd have a hyiu place to show off. War Bonnet is going to have a preacher or bust a cinch."

"We brings a wagon," states the first feller, "and we can take you-all right with us and haul down your effects later on."

"The raven fed Elijah," gasps Magpie. "Lead us to that wagon."

"Name's Pearce," says the soft speaker; "called 'Peaceful' 'cause I ain't. This feller is knowed as 'Happy,' 'cause he never was. Last name's Harmon. Come on, folks."

We rode out of town in the wagon, Magpie and Peaceful in the front seat and me and Happy in the back. It was some road, believe me. Peaceful missed most of the rocks with the front wheels, but the rear wheels didn't seem to interest him none to speak about. Sudden-like we lifts high on one side, the same of which seems to unbalance me, and then we slams the other side into a rock, and the preacher's wife grabbed for the seat and got her hands full of grass.

I sets there in the dark, with my feet tangled in my skirt, and tries to get that bonnet off my nose.

"Lawdee!" I hears Peaceful grunt. "Reverend, you-all's wife is overboard!"

"She sure is!" I yelps through my hat. "You —— fool, you couldn't herd a cow down a lane!"

All is still for a moment and then Peaceful says:

"I'm plumb glad, Reverend, that you-all's wife ain't one of them there 'holier than thou' sort of females. She sure speaks up."

"Emily," says Magpie choking-like, "get back on the wagon."

"All right, Mose," says I, and just as I climbs in several fellers rides up and seems to surround us.

"Who are you?" asks a voice.

"Hello, 'Baldy'," says Happy. "Who wants to know?"

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"Hello, Happy. Who's with you?"

"My Uncle Mose, Aunt Emily and Peaceful Pearce."

"Howdy, Peaceful," says another. "This is Pete Myers."

"I recognizes you, Pete. Who you-all expecting?"

"Nobody much. Evenin', folks," and they rides away.

We jolts along for a spell and then Happy says:

"Ma'am, every time I hear of anybody by the name of Mose I think of bulrushes. Does you connect your husband with that Bible story?"

"Partly," says I, "the first part. He's never rushed."

"You-all got a cold, ma'am?" asks Peaceful. "Voice sounds thick. Ever put anything around your neck?"

"Just took something off," says I. "Didn't do me any good."

"Rocking-chair ain't much benefit," says Magpie.

"Never heard of using one," says Peaceful. "How does you go about it?"

"Hang it on your neck in the dark."

"One of them there charm cures, eh?" asks Happy. "Might benefit."

"Never has," says Magpie, "but there's a first time for everything."

Then we drove into War Bonnet.

WAR BONNET is just about the same size as Paradise. If you don't know what size Paradise is, you ain't got nothing on anybody else, 'cause there ain't never been a census taken. Once in a while they totals up the casualties for the year and holds sort of a memorial, but the exact amount of survivors fluctuates.

War Bonnet strikes me as being a danged bad place to have your gun stick. I envies a picture I seen once. It was called "The Cow Girl." I never seen a cow girl in my whole life, but this picture shows her with a belt around her waist and a big Colt hanging in the holster.

My gun is down inside my bosom so far that I can't seem to get it loose, and that danged hammer is digging into me until I feels that I'm going to be a heap tattooed around the waistline.

Peaceful herds them broncs up to the door of a house. I reckon that news travels fast, 'cause Peaceful says to a woman who comes to the door—

"Ma, we got 'em."

And it ain't more than a minute until the front yard is full of female folks.

"Get out, Emily, and remember you're the spouse of a sky-pilot," whispers Magpie.

Happy helped me out—or rather yanked me out. I asks him if he's married, and he whispers—

"Not now. Why?"

I didn't get a chance to tell him, 'cause just then Magpie hops off the front wheel without thinking of that heavy six-gun in the tail of his coat. It caught inside the wagon-box as he dropped, and then she flips high and handsome and comes down on his head. Magpie sinks to his knees and Peaceful and Happy bows their heads and takes off their hats. They never seen him get hit.

Pretty soon Magpie staggers to his feet and says some words under his breath that you'll likely find in the Bible, but not all in one sentence, and the herd surrounds us.

One old girl got her arms around my neck and I has a —— of a time to keep her from rooting into my whiskers.

"Glory be!" she gurgles. "Oh, we need a minister so bad."

"That's the kind you've got," says I, and then I gets near enough to Magpie to kick him on the ankle.

"Razor!" I hisses in his ear. "I ain't no bearded lady!"

"Brethern," says Magpie, "canst any one loan me the lend of a razor? We comes away sudden-like, and my wife is so danged particular that she won't let me be seen in public without a shave."

Razors? Say, a barber would starve to death in a community like that.

"You-all hives up in my house tonight," says Peaceful, herding us inside, and War Bonnet's best citizens follers us in. Them women seems to consider me a heap and it makes me nervous.

"I'd admire to go somewhere and fix up a little," says I. "I fell out of that danged dead-ex wagon, and I has a feeling that I sat on a cactus."

"Haw! Haw—" begins somebody, but shuts right up.

"Right this way," says Peaceful, and he lets me and Magpie into a bedroom. Magpie has a lump the size of an egg on

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top of his head where that gun hit him. Both of my green stockings has come down and are under my shoes, and that fall seems to have unbuttoned my dress until that straight-jacket sticks out through the back. Magpie looks me over and seems to choke with emotion.

"Ike, you're the wildest-looking wife I ever had."

Just then somebody knocks on the door.

"Parson, what denomination does you represent?"

Magpie looks at me foolish-like and then back at the door.

"Round church—circular sect."

"Oh," says the feller. "I hoped you was a Baptist."

"New on me, Magpie," says I. "Round church?"

"Uh-huh. Paw said it was the best kind, 'cause the devil can't corner you, Ike."

As far back as I can remember, Ike Harper's face has been partly obscured with hair, but for once he gets a clean view of it.

My golden hair ain't hanging down my back, but I've got enough to bluff with. Magpie shaved my arms to the elbow and smoothed his own face a little. He also cinched up my dress and I managed to pin them green stockings so they won't trip me.

"Now," say I, "as soon as they gets into bed we'll make our sneak."

"Uh-huh. Just as soon as we can, Ike. Hang on to your nerve and don't cuss. We've got to locate some broncs. Remember you're a lady, Ike. More than that, old-timer, you're the wife of a preacher. Let's face the music."

THAT parlor is sure filled with folks. Peaceful seems to be sort of a leader. He comes up to Magpie and says:

"Reverend, I'm dawg-gone sorry, but I ain't never heard your name. I wants to introduce you-all to the folks."

"My name?" Magpie looks around foolish-like. "Thought you knowed it. I'm the Reverend Moses—er—Meek. This female person is Emily. Being married to me makes her Meek, too."

We shakes hands all around and then a tall, lanky female says to me:

"Seems like your face is familiar, dearie. What was your maiden name?"

"Lily Langtry," says I, thinking real quick and saying the first name what comes to me.

"Lily? I thought your husband called you Emily?"

"Lily was my maiden name," says I. "I've been married more than once."

"More than once?"

"Yeah. First time it was a Piegan squaw. Her name was Dawn——"

"I beg your pardon!" she gasps. "How could you——"

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" I hisses. "I was a Mormon."

"Oh!" says she and nods her head.

Maybe she understood, but I didn't. I makes up my mind to keep still after this.

Then Mrs. Peaceful skids up to me.

"My dear Mrs. Meek, is there anything I can do for you? Anything you would like to have?"

"Have you got the makings of a cigaret? Mine was in my pants——"

I sees Happy turn his head and stare at me and I bites my tongue.

Mrs. Peaceful is staring into my face and I says:

"For my husband. He's timid about smoking in company."

"Oh!" says she. "Certainly. How much?"

"Enough for about thirty cigarets," says I, and just then I hears Magpie's voice:

"Wine is verily a mocker, brethren. I shall devote my time in stamping out the evils of wine, women and—er—cigarets. Them little paper rolls, innocent as they may look, are the torch of the devil."

"How many did you say, Mrs. Meek?" she asks.

"Ma'am, you can use your own judgment. I ain't afraid of the devil."

This may sound foolish to some folks, but anybody who smokes them "torches of the devil" will appreciate my feelings. I ain't had a smoke since that misguided posse shot a hole in the cantle of my saddle, and right now I'm receptive to lynching if I can just have one little chance at a cigaret before they yank the rope.

I'm in a trance, thinking about a nice little smoke, when I hears Mrs. Peaceful saying to Magpie:

"Reverend Meek, can you spare your wife for one night? The fact is we're a little shy on sleeping accommodations. We

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only have two beds. My sister is with us, so you will have to sleep with my husband. Mrs. Jackson has kindly offered to take Mrs. Meek home with her for tonight."

That long, lanky female speaks up.

"Yes indeed, it will be a pleasure for me to entertain Mrs. Meek."

"Only for one night, of course," says Mrs. Peaceful, "Tomorrow we will fix you up in permanent quarters. You won't mind, will you, dearie?" says she to me, but I can't speak.

Gosh a'mighty, there is questions that Solomon couldn't answer.

"What's the matter, Reverend? Don't you feel well?"

I looks over at Magpie. I can see him sort of get tight all over, and his Adam's apple ducks up and down his throat one hundred and fifty ducks per minute.

"Can I bring you-all a drink?" asks Peaceful.

"Ug-ug-ug—" gasps Magpie. "Uh-huh-uh-uh-huh. About four-fingers in a wash-tub."

Me and Magpie stares at each other until Peaceful brings him a dipper of water, and then the darn fool stood right there and washed his face. Never took his eyes off me all the time. Just splashed the water on his face, like he was in a trance, and all this time I'm digging into the bosom of my dress, trying to get that blamed six-gun loose from a bunch of lace. I'm keyed up to kill without regrets.

"Do—do you-all have attacks like that very often?" asks Peaceful.

"No," says Magpie weak-like, leaning against the wall, "not very—thank Gawd!"

"Amen!" says Mrs. Jackson. "Flesh is weak."

"You're danged right," I whispers. "And she's getting weaker."

"Well," says Mrs. Jackson, "we might as well say good night. I know Mrs. Meek must be tired."

I know we shook hands. I was just about as happy over it as a feller would be who was shaking hands with a jury that had convicted him of murder in the first degree. I stumbles around that room, shaking hands like a darn fool, and then I hears Mrs. Peaceful saying—

"Kiss your wife good night, Reverend."

Most of 'em giggles like a lot of locoed loons and Magpie staggers over to me. He didn't kiss me, but they didn't know it. He hooks on to me like a grizzly bear and hisses in my ear:

"Think of something! Dang your hide, think fast!"

"Good night, Moses," says I. "Take care of yourself."

Then my knees got so weak that I tripped in my skirt and fell off the front porch.

I hears everybody expressing sympathy and crowding around me in the dark, but I got to my feet.

"Gracious!" exclaims one of them females. "Did you hurt yourself?"

"Skinned one leg all to thunder!" I snaps and walks out of there with Mrs. Jackson trailing me.

Think? My gosh, I thought of everything in the past and a lot of things in the future. She led me to her house, and shoved me inside. I guess she had furniture—I don't know.

"Will we have a prayer before we retire?" she asks.

My brain seems to have got so hard that I can't shake it, so I reckon I nods. I looks all around and then I says—

"You got two beds?"

"No, just one."

"Good night!" says I. "This won't work atall. I can't sleep a wink with a stranger. I've either got to hive up with my—uh—husband or sleep alone."

"Pshaw!" says she. "Now, ain't that too bad? I don't see what we are going to do."

Then I gets a inspiration.

"Why not have Mrs. Peaceful's sister sleep with you?"

"Well! Of course she can! You sure can figure out things, Mrs. Meek."

"Uh-huh. A preacher's wife has to."

"I suppose so. How long have you been with Mr. Meek?"

"Off and on for twelve years."

"Off and on?" she gasps.

"Yes'm. Two years ago me and 'Dirty Shirt' Jones——"

Then I remembers that I'm a lady.

"Yes, yes!" says she. "Tell me about it!"

"Tomorrow. She's a long, long tale, ma'am."

"Ho-huh, I suppose even ministers wives have their troubles."

"You know it," says I. "A dang sight more than you think."

The Pearce family was surprized to see

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us back, but when we explains things they sees my point of view and agrees to it.

MAGPIE stole the makings of cigarets from Happy Harmon, and we laid on that bed and smoked ourselves black in the face.

Every time Magpie looks at me he chokes. After he gets through having convulsions, we starts figuring out things.

"We've got to get away," says Magpie. "Honest to gosh, Ike! There ain't never been a preacher in War Bonnet, so Peaceful tells me. Greasewood manages to hire one and they crows over War Bonnet."

"I suppose everybody what wants to get married has to go to Greasewood, and if they wants to hold a funeral they has to call on the same city for help, eh?"

"Help ——! War Bonnet hates Greasewood so bad that they've held off their marriages for seven months! Down at the undertakers is two corpses waiting for a preacher, and they're figuring on holding revival services all the rest of the week."

"Peaceful told you all that, Magpie?"

"Yeah. War Bonnet hankers for a preacher like a calf for it's maw. Holy henhawks, look what I'm up against! I can't preach!"

We smokes a while and then I says—

"Magpie, did you ever read the Bible?"

"Read it? Part of it, Ike. I've read the dictionary, too, as far as that goes, but I can't repeat any of it. Darn this suit of clothes!"

"You ought to be proud of them clothes, Magpie. A darned old cow-thief like you ought to be glad to have folks mistake him for a preacher. Piety fits you like the diamonds on a rattlesnake."

"Yah!" he snorts. "Maybe. More than I can say for you, cause you can't be described in words, Ike. Them women looks you over, and I hears one of 'em say: 'The poor thing! A woman like that couldn't help being good.' Haw! Haw! Haw! Woman, you sure got some figure! It won't never do to let 'em see you in the daylight."

"Aw, ——! Let's get away, Magpie. The farther we are away from here in the morning the better it will be for us and for War Bonnet. Let's leave our baggage here and sneak away."

"We don't want no useless impediment, that's a cinch, Ike. Them valises are empty, I reckon."

Magpie picks one of 'em up and shakes it.

"Something in it, Ike. I can hear it swish."

He picks up a pair of shears off the dresser and rips a hole in the top. He stares inside for a while and then rips a hole in the top of the other one. Then he stumbles over to the bed and sets down.

"My ——!" he gasps. "I—I thought the mint was in Washington!"

"It sure is, Magpie."

"Like —— it is. It's in them satchels!"

I sneaked over, like I was afraid they'd fly away, and peers inside. Then I digs in with both hands. Greenbacks! Everything from fives to twentys. They don't weigh much, but—oh man! I dumps one of 'em on the bed and wealth spews all over the place.

Me and Magpie stares at each other for a while and then Magpie begins to grin.

"Well," says I, "what's so danged funny about it?"

"Don't you see it, Ike?" Magpie smooths his mustache and looks wise as a old owl. "Don't you see it? I ain't the only fake preacher in the county. Haw! Haw! Haw! Murder will out, as they say."

"Let her out then!" I snaps. "I want to laugh too."

"Ike, that Greasewood preacher is the *hombre* what robbed the bank. Last person on earth to be suspected, don't you see? He just puts it in his old valises and goes on preaching. *Sabe?* The son-of-a-gun!"

"Circumstantial evidence, Magpie."

"Circumstantial ——! Nothing circumstantial about it, Ike. Where would a preacher get all that money?"

"If they catch us with it he'll likely get a chance to pronounce 'ashes to ashes and dust to dust' over us," says I. "What will we do with it?"

Just then somebody knocked on our door.

Magpie looks at that money, slips his gun loose, walks over to the door and opens it about an inch. It's Peaceful.

"Reverend," says he apologetic-like, "I sure hates to disturb you-all, but 'Shirt-pocket Bill' has done got a slug inserted under his vest-pocket, and I reckon he's needing a preacher mighty bad. Can't you-all come up to the Golden Glow and

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ease him off? He can't last very long and —Shirtpocket's sort of religious—sort of."

Magpie hesitates and looks back at me.

"Go ahead, Mose," says I. "If you need help, send for me."

"Dawg-gone good of you-all," says Peaceful. "A woman's hand might sooth him a heap. Don't reckon that Shirtpocket ever had a decent woman speak to him. Be awful dawg-gone nice if you'd both come."

"Just as soon as I can get my pants—skirt on," says I. "Tell Shirtpocket Bill to wait for us."

He shuts the door and Magpie hops on to me.

"Dang you, Ike, you'll give us away yet! Why didn't you tell him we were sick or something? Shirtpocket Bill's demise don't mean nothing to me."

"Me neither, old-timer, but you got to play or get out of the pot. Cheer up, Moses Meek, he may die before we get there. This will give us a chance to see where some broncs are tied."

We fixed up a little and walked out to where Peaceful waits for us.

"This sure will tickle Shirtpocket all to thunder," says he.

"Reckon he'll be sorry he didn't get shot before."

"Yes," says I, "a long time before."

WE PILGRIMED up-town and went into a place where there seemed to be plenty of life—lot of dance-hall females, et cettery, and they sure looked me over. Likely I'm the first decent woman they ever seen in the Golden Glow.

We walked up to the bar and Peaceful says to the bartender:

"I done brought a little Gospel aid for Shirtpocket. Has he passed out yet?"

The hooch-handler looks us over and nods.

"Uh-huh. About ten minutes ago. Said he was coming back."

"Said he was coming back?" I asks.

"Yep. Jim Freeman, the *hombre* what shot him, is still here, and Shirtpocket said he was coming back to get him."

"Haunt him?" asks Peaceful.

"Haunt him?" The bartender slides a bottle and glasses in front of us. "Haunt him? I don't know—he didn't say."

"Whoa, Emily!" snorts Magpie and I stops that glass just short of my mouth. I puts it down, while they stares at me.

"Let the old girl have a shot if she wants it," says somebody behind me, and then Peaceful says—

"My ——! I thought you was killed, Shirtpocket!"

That *hombre* has the crookedest face I ever seen. He's got a gun on each hip and enough ammunition to exterminate the human race.

"Naw!" he grunts. "Slug hived up in a four-bit watch and knocked all the air out of me."

"Meet Reverend Meek, Shirtpocket. The lady is his wife. They comes up here to ease your last moments."

"My ——! They did? I'm going to have that busted watch set with diamonds and have it packed in a plush case. Ease my last moments? Well, well! I sure am eternally obliged—to the watch. Pleased to have metcha—alive and well."

Just then we hears a racket near the door and I turns to see that Greasewood sheriff and his deputies coming straight for the bar. I kicks Magpie in the ankle and digs into my bosom for my gun. Peaceful sees 'em, too. He loosens his gun and walks right across the room to where a bunch of fellers are playing roulette. There ain't a thing for me and Magpie to do but stand still.

"Shoot 'em in the neck, Ike!" hisses Magpie. "They might have watches in their pockets."

That fool gun stuck again! I yanks the bosom of my dress up around my neck, but the gun won't let loose, so I reaches over and picks the bottle off the bar.

The sheriff stares at me and Magpie and we stare right back at him.

"You-all better go back to Greasewood," states Peaceful's voice and the sheriff turns.

There is Peaceful and several others and they've all got their guns out. The sheriff stares around and just then I sees Shirtpocket Bill yank a gun with each hand. I glances at the door and there stands a *hombre* with a sawed-off shotgun in his hands.

"Stand back!" he yelps. "There ain't four-bit timepieces enough in the town to stop all this lead!"

He yanks the gun to his shoulder just as Shirtpocket begins to heave lead from both guns. I dropped flat when Shirt-

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pocket opened up, and just as I hits the floor I hears that shotgun roar twice and about all the illumination in the saloon gets busted.

Then I hopped to my feet. I knew where that sheriff stood when the lights went out, so I pops him over the head with that bottle of hooch. Then I grabs Magpie by the arm and starts for the door. Somehow I gets that gun loose this time. I feels that the upper part of my dress is up around my neck and the lower part is down around my feet, but this ain't no time for modesty.

"Straight ahead!" I yelps. "Get your gun loose and help me cut a trail!"

"Whoo-ee!" I hears Peaceful yelp. "Try to take our preacher back, will you?"

Bing! Bang! Boom!

We plows straight for that door. Evidently we ain't the only ones hunting for the open air, 'cause when we hits the crowd coming from the other side—blooey! They knocked me over backwards and I hit the keys of the piano with both elbows as I comes down. Magpie was behind me, and when we stops falling I'm setting on him with my feet over the piano stool.

The fighting has moved out into the street. One kerosene lamp hangs like a drunken bird on a perch and flickers like it was about all in. I blinks the stars out of my eyes and then a voice under me begins to sing, soft and low—

"It's a long ways back to de-e-e-e-ear o-o-o-o-old mother's knee-e-e."

He held that last note until I turned over and peered into his face. Then I got up and staggered over in front of the bar. There is Magpie, setting with his back against the rail. He don't even look at me, but his lips seem to move, and so I leans closer to hear:

"It's—as—good—or—as—bad—as—any—other. If—it—wasn't—as—for—circumstantial—evidence—we—wouldn't——"

"Be here," says I. "Wake up, you asinine arguifier!"

I yanks his feet around and he stares up at me foolish-like.

"Wh-where's the sheriff?" he whispers.

"Over by the piano. I sat on him until he got sentimental."

"Where's Peaceful?"

"My gosh! Think I'm night-herding everybody?"

"I ain't thinking, Emily. Somebody hit my thinker so hard—say, woman, you better get out of sight. You're a walking scandal!"

I looks at myself and raises the ante. I've lost my skirt. Just then a card-table seems to get up and walk. It walks into a corner of the bar and out from under it comes Peaceful. He appears to have been hit several times. In fact, I'd say that he had been hit all of the time.

He steadies himself against the bar and stares at us—mostly at me. He shakes his head and looks around, but his eyes turn back to me. After while he nods solemn-like and says:

"Dead and in ——! I knowed I had it coming to me."

From over by the piano comes a high-pitched voice singing—

"For I'm a po-o-o-o-or cowbo-o-o-o-oy and I know I've done wrong."

"We all have," nods Peaceful. "'Less we did we wouldn't be here," and he staggers out of the place.

I TEARS the top off that card-table and makes myself a nice green apron. Then me and Magpie walks outside and that Greasewood sheriff is right on our heels.

"What do you want, feller?" asks Magpie.

The sheriff sort of has trouble with his voice, but pretty soon he says—

"You two——"

That's as far as he got. Magpie hit him so hard that his head hit the ground before his body did.

"I figure he's the one what hit me," says Magpie, sucking his knuckles. "Somebody hit me, and they can't do it and get away with it, believe me!"

"They sure can't," says I. "I'd do the same, Magpie."

And right in the middle of the street I stripped that sheriff clean and piled what was left of them female clothes upon his sleeping form. Any time they tell you that clothes don't make the man—let 'em wear skirts for a while.

"What started it, anyway, Ike?" asks Magpie. "I don't seem to *sabe* much."

"More of your circumstantial evidence. Peaceful thought that the sheriff had been sent here to take their preacher away from War Bonnet, and the War Bonneters objected at the top of their voices."

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"Too bad, Ike. I hates deception in any form. Let's find a couple of broncs. We're going back and expose a fake preacher. *Sabe?*"

We crosses the street and walks up the other side. Folks are beginning to drift back to the Golden Glow and we don't want nobody to see us. Here and there we hears the pop of a gun, which shows that the spirit is still awake.

We finds a rack full of horses and we sneaks up to look 'em over. I eases up to one and feels of the saddle. Honest to grandma, I took right hold of the cantle, and my fingers sunk into that bullet hole. I digs into the sheriff's pockets and finds a match. It's my bronc, as sure as shooting, and the one next to it is Magpie's.

"Glad I hit that danged sheriff, Ike," says Magpie. "Didn't take 'em long to appropriate our stuff, did it? Well, we ain't stealing when we takes back our own property."

"Now," says I, "let's go far and fast."

"I don't think we will. We're going to get that money at Peaceful's and we're going to show up Greasewood's minister. *Sabe?*"

"Aw, ——! What do we care, Magpie? Leave the money where it is."

"We will not! I'm going to square myself by sending a preacher to the pen."

"Well, let's get into the bedroom window then. I won't walk through the front door and explain things to Mrs. Peaceful—or Peaceful."

We rode behind the house and tied our broncs and sneaked up to the window. Being in practise, we has no trouble getting in without making any noise. We didn't no more than get inside when we hears voices in the parlor. We strains our ears.

"You-all brings queer news," opines Peaceful's voice. "Almighty queer! I sure am shocked a heap."

"It's the Gospel truth," says another voice. "One of your citizens—Happy Harmon, I believe it was—bragged to one of my flock, or we would not have known it so soon."

"Augusta," whispers a voice right beside us, "are you awake?"

"Yes, sister. What is the matter?"

I hears Magpie stiffen beside me and gasp under his breath:

"The wrong room! My ——!"

Then somebody knocks on the door.

"Honey," says Peaceful's voice, "are you-all asleep?"

"No, dear. What is wrong?"

"Can you-all come out here?"

"Not unless we dress. Why?"

"Got some funny news to tell you. Can you-all cover up good so we can come in?"

Me and Magpie slides to the floor and under the bed just as the door opens.

"Reverend, this is my wife and her sister. Excuse 'em for being in bed."

"Not at all. Not at all. Don't mention it."

"Honey," says Peaceful, "them wasn't preacher folks we had here. Dawg-gone 'em, they impostered upon us. Seems that the sheriff puts 'em in jail for robbing a bank and shooting the cashier. Sheriff took away their clothes, but they got away just the same and they burgled the Reverend's home. They stole his clothes and his wife's clothes, too, and——"

"She—she wasn't a woman?" gasps Mrs. Peaceful. "She wasn't?"

"Nope. She was a he."

"My heavenly home! She was going to sleep—Oh, my!"

"Yes, they were low-down imposters," says the preacher. "I came all the way down here to expose them. No doubt they had designs for some crooked work in War Bonnet. They are of low morals and a menace to society. It would give me great pleasure to lay my hands——"

"Ow-w-w-w-w!"

The sky-pilot was standing near the bed, so Magpie reaches out, grabs him by the feet and yanks him upside-down. I grabbed Peaceful. I only got one boot, but I sure yanked hard and I heard a rocking chair give up the ghost when he landed on it.

Then me and Magpie skids out from under that bed and stops at the door with a gun in each hand. The women ducks under the covers, while the preacher and Peaceful looks up at us like we was ghosts.

"Preacher," pants Magpie, "you talk too much. *Sabe?* We're here to get the evidence that will send you over the road."

"O-over the r-r-road?" he gasps.

"Danged right!" snaps Magpie. "You're the jasper what robbed the bank. In that other room is two valises with a lot of money in 'em, and they came from your bedroom. *Sabe?* Preacher ——! You ain't no more preacher than I am!"

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"Two valises with money in them?" he grasps, turning green.

"Yes, two valises with money in them!" mocks Magpie.

"Ah!" The preacher sets up and stares at us. "You—you took those valises? Give them back to me—please. That is the money we raised in Greasewood to build a church. We—we thought it would be safer there than in the bank, don't you see?"

Me and Magpie looks at each other and then back at the two on the floor.

"It's in the other room," says Magpie in a far-away voice. "You're much obliged to it."

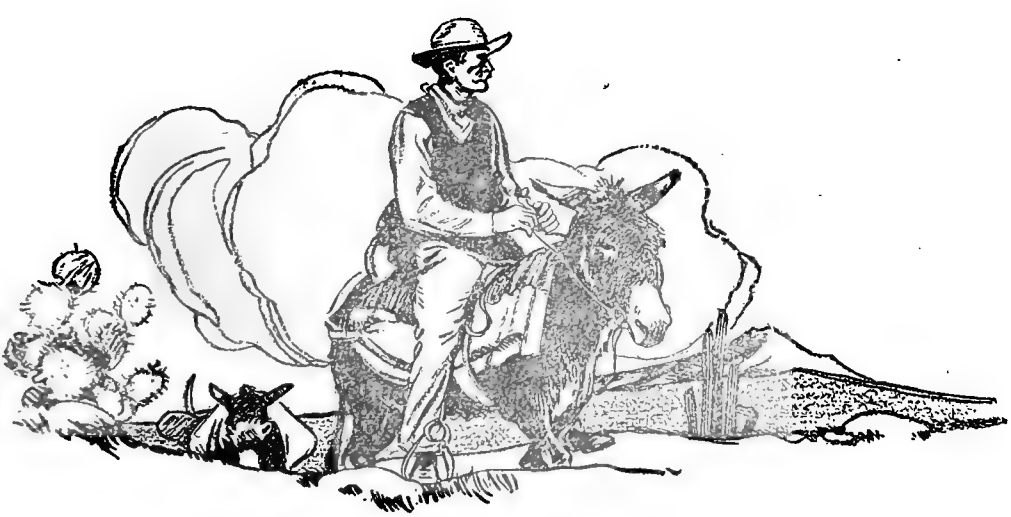
"Dud—don't mention it," says the preacher. "I—I never robbed any bank. The sheriff caught the real robbers early this evening and he came back to let you out, but you was gone. He brought your horses to War Bonnet. Said he was going to apologize and give them back to you, and——"

BUT me and Magpie walked out of the front door, got on our broncs and drifted toward a very pale north star. When we're out of sight of War Bonnet, Magpie skids his bronc across the trail and rolls a cigaret. I finds the makings in the sheriff's pockets. He didn't have anything else in them. I sent 'em back to him later—along with his gun. We got our smokes to going.

"Feller men should be circumspect," says I. "Each and every man should live like an open book. It ain't noways possible for every crime to have a witness and you can't acquit a man just because he sneaks up on his criminal occupation in the dark when everybody else is asleep."

"Ike," says Magpie soft-like, "I hate to argue, but I'll say right here and now that you're crazy if you even think so. Tell you why you're wrong. Just because a feller can't prove he's innocent——"

And we went on our way rejoicing over another argument.



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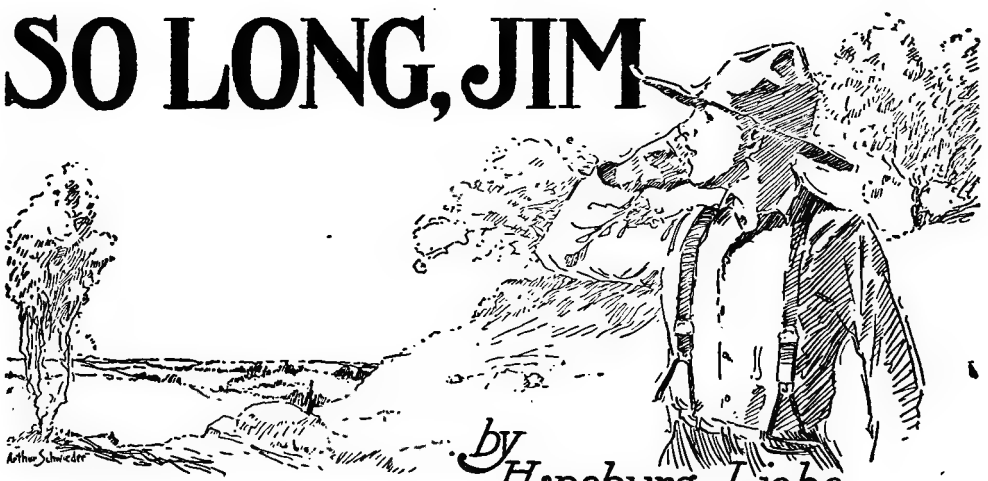
SO LONG, JIM



by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "Godfather to Satan's Kitchen," "The Last Joke of Joker Joe," etc

THE man who owned the logging-outfit on Skeleton Creek in the Little Smoky Mountain country furnished evidence that he himself was not without a measure of patriotism, by giving all his former employees their places back when the Army was through with them, though he had to discharge other capable loggers in order to do it. Jim Lord, a hickory-strong and strapping young hillman whose most striking characteristic was a strange and half-wild sort of dignity, had been superintendent before; now he was superintendent again and with an increase in pay—with the distinct understanding, however, that he was to put a steel-ribbed ban on fighting. This great game of the timberjacks had become so prevalent at Skeleton Creek that it interfered much with the work. The defeated man, of course, true to the way of the mountaineer, immediately left the camp for other and disgraceless fields of endeavor.

Lord himself had been a fighter and a champion. Now he was to lose his job automatically the next time he fought, except in defense of himself. It was so written in the year-long contract he had signed.

A clear June night had just fallen with the full moon almost at its zenith. Jim Lord—they called him "Lord Jim" because of that half-wild dignity of his—stood in the commissary's front doorway, his gaze turned soberly down the wooded, moon-light-flooded valley. From the big storeroom behind him came the laughing and joking and fun-poking of his crew, but he was entirely oblivious to it. Then the slender figure of a barefooted and bareheaded young woman in calico suddenly detached itself from the deep shadows at the farther edge of the camp clearing and walked easily and gracefully toward him.

Lord frowned heavily as he recognized her in the silvery glow. He set his teeth tightly, as if for some trying ordeal, and turned upon his score of loggers. He was not oblivious to the uproar now.

"Cut it!" he ordered. His voice rang sharply, though he spoke in his native hill drawl. "The's a woman a-comin'."

The timberjacks obeyed readily, all but one of them. That one was the outfit's trouble-brewer and would-be bully, a giant named John Tom Colyer, who hailed originally from the wilderness around the head of a stream known as Catbird Creek. John Tom Colyer let out a half-defiant, wholly impudent and very nearly correct imitation of the braying of a certain animal of the mule family.

"Haw! Ee-haw! Ee-haw! Ee-haw!"

The silence that followed this was nothing less than tomb-like. Young Superintendent Lord's steel boot-calks clattered on the rough floor and broke that silence. He strode straight up to Colyer and put a hand on his great shoulder.

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"Look here, 'Catbird,'" he growled, "you know my job depends, fo' one thing, on me keepin' down the fightin' here. You know, also, that I won't fire ye on 'count of a pussonal grudge, me bein' o' bigger caliber 'an that. But I'd shore like to leave this wi' ye, Catbird: I don't jest haf to have a super's job anywhere. Ef ye keep on the way ye've started out wi' me, I'm shore a-goin' to lay a lickin' on ye 'at nineteen loggin'-locomotives cain't begin to pull off! Unnerstand that, Catbird? Job or no job, unnerstand?"

For a full half-minute there was a battle, with eyes for weapons, and the superintendent won out.

"I simply cain't find it in me to believe ye're man enough to do it, Lord Jim," muttered Catbird John Tom Colyer from Catbird Creek.

"You cain't, hey? You didn't believe the'd be a war, either," Lord Jim replied quickly. "Now I've put my cyards on the table a-facin' upwards——"

He broke off because he had heard the soft footfalls of the girl as she crossed the threshold. In spite of himself he wheeled and faced her. She gave him a bare glance of something that was far more than mere disdain, something that was akin to utter hatred nurtured long, and whipped up to the counter and the sallow little clerk behind it and demanded, rather than asked for, a pound of granulated sugar.

AT THAT same instant the commissary had yet another visitor. It was a boy, a slender and barefooted, sunburnt and freckled boy of about fourteen who had an air of being entirely sufficient unto himself in any of the walks of life that chance might draw him into. He wore a slouch hat that must have been four sizes too big for him, a ragged pair of jeans trousers and a much torn cotton shirt that boasted a single crooked button.

"H'lo!" he grinned, sending a worn, faded and almost empty clothes-bag to the floor with a pseudo-reckless fling. "H'lo there, you fellers—h'lo there, you skirt!"

Quite deliberately and vitriolically he turned up his freckled nose at Miss Daisy June Aylett, and that charming little nymph of the woods reciprocated with a promptness that was both amazing and amusing. The two stared at each other belligerently for a few seconds, after which the boy turned from Daisy June as if she were really not worth thinking about, and ran his topaz eyes over the strapping woodsmen.

"'Bantam' McEllery," he crowed. "'Wild Matt' McEllery's boy, sometimes knowed as 'Little Mister' McEllery; natchel-borned Dimacrat and fighter to the bone, that's me! Say, clerk, I wants a five cents straight seegar and a match to light 'er up with, git me?"

Alexander the Great or Cæsar may have spoken in tones like those on rarely victorious occasions, but most probably not. The loggers and their superintendent, the clerk, even the girl, all of them laughed outright. The lad flushed delightedly, got his cigar and paid for it with a flourish and his last nickel, and began to bite off the small end in a faultless fashion.

Daisy June Aylett received her pound of sugar, paid for it and departed like a spirit. Catbird Colyer would have followed her, doubtless, had it not been for the innovation provided by the unexpected arrival of the precocious Bantam McEllery. The lad scratched a match and lighted the long black cigar, sent a tiny cloud of smoke circling toward the roof and eyed the loggers with a satisfied air. He occupied the whole stage and he knew it better than anybody else.

"Who," he finally asked condescendingly, flicking off an infinitesimal speck of new ash from the dark weed, "is the super o' this here dinky little outfit? Shorely not you, Catbird!"

So he knew Catbird Colyer. The high light of the Skeleton Creek camp made a mental note of that. The trouble-brewer and would-be bully answered readily:

"Lord Jim. He's the super o' 'this here dinky little outfit.'"

"Lord Jim?" The lad narrowed his eyes. "Jest who does he happen to be, Catbird?"

"Jim Lord."

"Oh," muttered Bantam as if he should have known that. "And where is he at, Catbird?"

"He's 'at' here," said Lord himself. "I'm him. What's on ye mind, little Mr. McEllery? Want to sell some lightnin'-rods, or the moon and stars—or what?"

Little Mr. McEllery puffed grandiosely at his black cigar.

"Oh, 'tain't nothin' like that," said he

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"I only wanted a job. Two bucks a week and all I can eat, that's what I charges fo' bein' kitchen-boy. I'm a dandy kitchen-boy, Lord Jim. How about it, Lord Jim? Does I stay here wi' ye, or does I not? I'm all to the mustard and ye can shore bet on that."

Lord smiled a little. Somehow, he didn't know why, he felt drawn toward that self-sufficient, not altogether bad, boy of Wild Matt McEllery's.

"I'll keep ye, son," he said finally. "Go to the cooky and tell him I said to gi' ye some supper and show ye a bunk. The boardin'-house is right back o' the commissary. But I reckon ye'll prob'ly be a-goin' home purty soon, seein' as you ain't hardly the boy to burn ye bridges behind ye."

Little McEllery looked quickly down at his ragged jeans trousers. Then he looked at Lord Jim again.

"Burn my britches behind me!" he exclaimed wonderingly, seeking to find the point of that which he thought must be a new logging-camp joke. "You bet I ain't a goin' to burn my britches behind me, nor anywhere else ef I knows it. I ain't got no other britches but these here I'm a-wearin'. Do ye think I ain't got enough sense to git in out o' the rain?"

Lord laughed at the innocent, and his crew followed suit to a man.

"I meant," said Lord, "when you go places you don't do anything to keep ye from a-comin' back. See, son?"

Bantam puffed and puffed at the Samsonian cigar.

"I reckon I been a doin' perjackly that," he said about half-sadly, "everywhere I've went. Perjackly that. Burnin' my britches behind me, as you say."

Then he began to eye the Skeleton Creek superintendent up and down and sidewise, as the saying is. Evidently he was satisfied with that which he saw in Lord. He placed his partly burned weed on the counter, warned those in the commissary that it wasn't to be knocked off either by accident or design, caught up his slender clothes-bag and hastened toward the big and rough boarding-house.

When he had gone Lord Jim turned to his men.

"Humph! Anybody here ever seed that young harrycane afore? He knowed you, Catbird, didn't he?"

"I reckon mebbe he's seed me some'eres," John Tom Colyer answered rather sourly, frowning. "Yeuh—I rickollect now; he's 'Wild Matt' McEllery's boy, all right. Matt was shore bad and he was some fighter, but he had a real nice woman fo' a wife. He wanted her to run here and yonder with him, a-draggin' the boy along, and she wouldn't do it; she couldn't be a gipsy; she wanted to have a home and live in it. Matt run foul o' the law, and his wife took the boy and went back to her pap's; then Matt stole the boy from her and nobody seems to know what become of her after that.

"Matt hated wimmen after his wife took her foot in her hand and left him, and he teached the boy to hate wimmen; see how he turned up his nose at Daisy June? Then Matt crossed gun-sights with a sheriff who could shoot a quarter of a fraction of a second quicker'n he could, and he's now ingaged in holdin' down a place in a three-by-seven hole in the ground. Which is everything I happens to know about it, Lord Jim."

JIM LORD crossed his half-bare, bronzed forearms over his ample chest and began to caress his chin with thumb and forefinger. He, himself, was not wholly at peace with womankind. Not that he hated the other sex; he could never bring himself to that. Daisy June Aylett, that winsome little personification of sauciness who had been in the commissary but a few minutes before, was the cause of the trouble.

To get at the bottom of the thing quickly, he could hardly eat, sleep or work intelligently for thinking of Daisy June; they would have married, had it not been for the untimely death of the girl's wayward brother. Daisy June held desperately to the belief that Jim Lord had killed him following a bitter fight, though the courts had brought out the fact that Lord had fought only in defense of himself and that the killing had been done by an unknown party or parties. The girl, uneducated but ultra-feminine for all of that, had not been able to rid herself of her terrible first impression, and she therefore stoutly refused even to approach the bridge that the courts had built over the abyss that yawned between her and Jim Lord.

Another more or less interesting feature of the matter was that her father, old Jephthah Aylett, a man of his word despite

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his lack of scruples in other lines, had told her that she could never come back home if she married Jim Lord.

Catbird Colyer, too, had been suspected of doing for Daisy June's bad brother, but there had been no proof whatever; he had not even been arrested. Daisy June now kept company with Colyer for no reason other than because she knew that it cut Lord to the quick. This was neither small nor mean in Daisy June; it was merely the way of the mountain-heart.

Lord Jim began to pace the floor. The ghost of his two-years-old grief, for it was a grief, was upon him once more; he forgot that he was the object of some forty closely watching eyes.

There was the soft pitapatting of bare feet, and he turned toward the doorway to see young Bantam McEllery crossing the sill. All of the lad's former air of self-assurance was gone now, and he was miserable, sickly pale; even his lips had become whitish and his walk was decidedly unsteady.

Lord's countenance lightened. A look of full understanding appeared in his sober eyes. He took from the counter the stub of the boy's black cigar and proffered it smilingly.

"You're back after this, son, hey?"

"No!" cried Little Mister McEllery with the wryest of faces. "It—it made me sick; it made me awful sick; it made me s-s-sicker'n a dawg! Do somepin' fo' me, Lord Jim, please. Do anything, jest so ye don't gi' me any old, burny medicine."

"Didn't ye never," Lord asked quietly, "smoke any seegars afore, son?"

"No," frankly admitted Bantam. "I—I thought I was actin' real smart. I——"

"Ye was actin' smart, all right," smiled Lord Jim. "The trouble was ye didn't git away with it."

He took the ailing newcomer up in his arms and carried him to his own bed in a room in a down-stairs corner of the boarding-house, where he administered black coffee by tablespoonfuls in the hope it would help. For several hours he nursed little McEllery as tenderly as the boy's own unfortunate mother could have done, playing religiously the part of the comforter extraordinary, and then the patient went to sleep and dreamed of a giant who carried a huge black cigar for a club.

When the morning broke Bantam opened his eyes and found the Skeleton Creek outfit's superintendent sleeping in a chair beside the bed. The lad put out his hand and found the hand of Jim Lord. The latter-named awoke at the touch and he awoke smiling, his half-wild dignity for the moment gone.

"I'll be yore kitchen-boy fo' nothin', Lord Jim, shore. Ef ye want to ye can beat me. I'm yore dawg."

Thus spake Bantam McEllery, son of Matt McEllery the outlaw, Democrat and fighter to the bone; and he meant it. It was the beginning of a friendship so tight that it ran, on one side at least, almost into idolatry.

TWO weeks passed, and July came. In those two weeks little McEllery, in one way or in another, had found out about all there was to know concerning Jim Lord and the things that worried him so much; the boy's struggle for his own survival had sharpened his wits, made them razor keen, and he had an almost uncanny power of judgment.

Daisy June had been accepting the attentions of Colyer in a more tantalizing manner than ever—though she never failed to quarrel with him when there was nobody to overhear—and Jim Lord was put deeper and deeper into his mental thicket of nettles. Lord was not blind to her motive, and it was nothing for anybody to laugh at. Since the time when mountain-women came into existence, they have married, some of them, out of pure spite, and Jim Lord was aware of it. There was a chance that Daisy June would do that same thing, he knew, out of the sheer bitterness in which she held him.

Also in those two weeks Catbird John Tom Colyer from Catbird Creek had been busy trying to frame up a dark little scheme of his very own. Catbird was a good logger, especially from his eyes down, and he was, which was common knowledge in the Skeleton Creek camp, next in line for the superintendency. If he could succeed in taunting Lord into breaking his own iron rule and fighting him, he would whip Lord and then there would be the superintendent's place for himself. If Lord didn't leave of his own accord the outfit with which he was disgraced, his employer would discharge him for having so flagrantly broken the camp's first rule. He, Catbird Colyer,

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would be fighting in self-defense, of course.

It never occurred to Colyer that he might fail to win out in a battle with his superintendent. Colyer was one of these doubly cocksure fellows.

Little McEllery, now holding Lord in a light of worship that was almost pathetic, took it upon himself to solve the problem which rose before his god with all the dimensions and aspect of a mountain of stone. He didn't believe that Lord would easily consent to discuss the matter with anybody and especially with him, a boy; therefore he wisely chose what the professors would call a psychological moment for mentioning it.

It was on a lazy Sunday afternoon, and Lord and the lad had walked together down the Skeleton to look for brook-trout; they had halted on a great flat stone that overhung a sparkling pool.

"Le's set down here, Jim," began the boy with much seriousness. "I got a batch o' talk fo' you."

They sat down beside each other. Lord idly took up a bit of loose stone and flung it to the water below. Little Mister McEllery pinched his lower lip, scratched his head, reddened somewhat and put out a feeler.

"I—I like you, Jim. I like you a heap. I don't like anybody better'n I like you, Jim."

"Much obleeged to ye, son, shore," Lord replied appreciatively. "I like you, too, Bantam."

"Do ye like me better'n anybody else?"

The question came straight, as it were, from the shoulder.

No answer.

Half the color left Bantam McEllery's face. He forgot all that he had meant to say to his god and flared hotly:

"You're gone clean bug-house about that fool woman, Lord Jim! A fool woman! Lost ye head, plumb crazy as a double idjit about her, that nifty-lookin', sassy, sheep-killin', stuck-up, high-nosed, sassy, bow-laigged Daisy June Aylett! Name o' goodness, Jim, ain't ye got even hoss sense? You—you a-mournin' like a sick moon-calf after a woman what would take sech a pizen polecat of a animile as Catbird Colyer afore she'd take you. Ef it was me, I——"

Lord interrupted the lad. Lord's smile was cold and queer.

"I reckon that'll be about enough, Little Mr. McEllery. I really wouldn't choose to hear any more. As fer as Daisy June's consarned, I don't know o' her killin' anybody's sheep, and ef she's bow-laigged—ef ef—ef——"

Lord floundered. The boy took it up:

"Yeuh. Perjackly. What about it ef she is?"

"I reckon it's her own business, son." Lord threw another bit of loose stone to the water below and went on. "You shore covered a heap o' terrytory in that little talk o' yorn a minute ago, Bant. You can pat yeself on the back. You're the only pusson on the face o' the earth what could have that talk in my hearin' and stand on yore feet at the finish of it. That's the Gawspel accordin' to Jim Lord, Bant."

"Listen at him!" The McEllery rose and glared down at Jim Lord. "Listen at him, will ye? I never meant she was bow-laigged in her—her knees. I meant she was bow-laigged in her head. Pore old Jim, I'm sorry fo' ye. Hawnest I am. It's a disease ye've got, Jim, a awful disease! Jim, old pal, I want to ax ye somepin', and I wants the solid, God's truth. Won't nothin', nothin' on earth never break ye o' that?"

Lord stared solemnly at the lad. He knew little McEllery was in deadly earnest, and he did not feel unkindly toward him now. After a long and silent minute he answered soberly:

"Only one thing, and that's death. Ef the' ain't no life afterwards, that is. You'd natchelly want me to be happy, little 'un, wouldn't ye?"

"Shore, Jim! Shore! Jim, you listen to me. Didn't it never strike ye that Catbird Colyer could reelly ha' killed Daisy June's brother? The' was talk of it, ye know."

"Not much talk of it, son."

Lord considered. It was a boy that he was confiding in, but that boy was, he knew, his friend in all truth. When his voice came again he seemed to be speaking more to himself than to Bantam McEllery.

"I was wild then, the same as Bill Aylett and Catbird Colyer. Wilder'n a wildcat, a heap. I jest couldn't help it, it seemed like. But I've shore sobered up sence the time when Bill was killed.

"We went to a dance over at 'Grandpap' Catesby's. I had to fight Bill that night. I reckon, though, I didn't fight Bill as much as I jest tried to keep him from a-fightin' me, son. I left at midnight and Bill follered me and Catbird follered Bill, but I never see Catbird any more ontel the next

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mornin'. When Bill ketched up wi' me he said he'd been a fool and wanted to shake hands, and we did. Bill was purty onsteady on his feet. Where the trail forked he said he could go home all right, and that's the last time I ever saw him alive. He was found dead, shot, at daylight. I don't know who done it, but it shore wasn't me."

"I'd done heerd all o' that," said Bantam, "and, a-knowin' Catbird Colyer like I do, I'm a bettin' both eyes it was him 'at killed Bill Aylett. I can shore quare Catbird wi' Daisy June, and I'll do it, too, ef ye wants me to, Lord Jim."

"How?"

"Why, Catbird's been married oncet, and his wife kicked the bucket. Some the' was who said it was because he was so mean to her. They had one baby and the baby died too. I can tell Daisy June all o' that, and she'll up and knock his head off. What ye say, must I?"

Lord shook his head.

"Not fo' me, son. It ain't my way."

"It ain't mine, neither, but I'd do it fo' you, old pal." Bantam thrust out his jaw like the fighter he was. "I'll tell her and I'll tell her this very day. So-long, Jim!"

HE DIVED into the laurels that lined that bank of the creek and was gone like an arrow, leaving Lord staring absently down into the sparkling pool below him.

There could hardly have been a better time for making Miss Daisy June Aylett acquainted with certain of the past performances of her apparently favored but secretly despised suitor, John Tom Colyer from Catbird Creek, for Colyer and Daisy were sitting near each other on one end of the Aylett cabin's vine-hung porch when the boy arrived.

Old Jephthah himself, a sour-visaged, cruel-eyed man of fifty, sat glowering at nothing on the other end of the porch. It was common gossip in the neighborhood that the girl, who was motherless and brotherless and the only daughter of this particular house of Aylett, was sooner or later going to be forced into marriage in order to be rid of her extremely unsympathetic father.

Bantam vaulted the split-paling fence, saw his opportunity with eyes that twinkled anything but merrily, ran to the porch steps and bawled with youthful lustiness:

" 'Hey, Bess, the house is afire! Put that young 'un down, grab that best hound pup and come on!' "

Old Jephthah, surprized, growled something unintelligible. Daisy June stared in wonderment, and Catbird Colyer went as red as a freshly pickled beet and began to glare hotly and guiltily.

"What—what ye mean by that?" he demanded.

His breath came in noisy gasps; his fingers jerked and his face twitched.

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" yelled little McEllery. "Yah! Yah! Yah! Oh, you, Catbird! Thought I didn't know it, didn't ye? I know it all right. Say, Daisy, you shore picked a peacherino for a feller to keep comp'ny with. You shore did! Catbird? Yeuh, perjackly. Ef a snake'd bite him, the snake'd die; it wouldn't never hurt Catbird. He's been married afore, Daisy June. Yeuh. Listen, and I'll tell ye all the' is to tell——"

Colyer leaped to his feet. The girl, too, rose quickly and put a hand on his arm and arrested his movement toward the boy.

"Tattle-rat!" he fumed. "A-comin' here wi' a pack o' lies, a-stickin' yore nose into somebody else's business! Clear out! Go on back to Jim Lord, the sneakin' murderer what sent ye here. Begone—unnerstand?"

"Who? Me?" sneered Bantam. "A-talkin' to me? I'm deef, dumb, and blind. I cain't hear, talk, or see when a polecat like you tells me to 'begone.' Jim Lord never sent me here, neither. He never! Hope to drap dead ef he did. Say, Daisy June. Listen!"

The boy stood his ground fearlessly, as became him. The dust that had been Wild Matt McEllery must have smiled. Bantam then told the girl of Colyer's marriage, of his wife's death and of their child's death and went on like a rapid-firing gun:

"To show ye how snaky pizen he was, listen! One night their house ketched afire and he told his wife to put the baby down and gether up the best one o' the old hound's pups and come on! Him hisself, he was too skeered to carry anything out, and that's the kind o' copperhead he is, Daisy June. I thought mebbe ye'd like to know about it."

Daisy June faced Colyer with eyes that did more than accuse. Colyer's brutish face worked; he tried to talk, to deny the

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charge, but the girl's gaze disconcerted him and the words wouldn't come. Old Jephthah chuckled an asinine chuckle.

"I reckon, John Tom," said Daisy June in tones that savored of a judgment, "ye'd better be a-goin'. And," she added, "I ain't a-cryin' a tubful about it ef ye don't never find it in ye heart to come back."

Catbird snatched his broad-rimmed hat from the floor and went. He scowled threateningly at Bantam McEllery as he passed him on the steps. Old Jephthah chuckled asininely again, rose stiffly, put a hand through a near-by window, drew out an old-fashioned rifle and put out for the woods to hunt a squirrel for supper, but when he had reached the gate he stopped and looked back at his daughter.

"A-huntin' on Sunday, pap? It ain't right!" cried Daisy June.

"We'll never know the difference a hundred years from now," retorted the old hillman. "Look here, Daisy. I'm tellin' ye oncet more, ef ye take up wi' Jim Lord, ye shore cain't never darken my door ag'in. I've done said it and you know I allus keeps my word."

Daisy June had no reply to that. Her father hitched his rifle into the hollow of his arm and walked lazily off. Old Jephthah had no special reason for his prejudice against Lord. He didn't like him simply because he didn't like him, and that was all there was to it.

"Whew!" observed little McEllery. "Some pap ye've got, Daisy June! Ef he was mine I'd set a bear-trap fo' him and let him die in it."

The boy now saw an opportunity to do some tall talking for his Lord Jim, his god and his pal, whom he liked better than anybody else on earth. He walked over to the chair that Catbird Colyer, the vanquished, had but a minute before vacated, sat down and made himself smile engagingly at Daisy June Aylett, that fascinating little specimen of the womankind that he had been taught to hate religiously. The girl, too, sat down.

"Daisy," the McEllery began, "I want to ax ye somepin' and I want ye to tell me the solid, God's truth. I like Jim Lord as well as you ever liked him and I do shore want to see him happy. Ain't the' nothin' on earth, not a single thing, what could make ye take him back ag'in?"

Daisy June didn't answer immediately. She eyed the lad as if she wished to make sure that he was in earnest, and he met her gaze without the least sign of flinching. Then, though she had come of fighting stock, something seemed to give away within her troubled bosom and her chin broke into a pathetic little series of quivers.

"Yes, honey," she finally told him softly, brokenly, "the' is. It's fo' me to know without any doubt at all that Lord Jim never killed my b-b-brother——"

She bent her face to her hands and her shoulders shook. Bantam McEllery somehow did not feel quite equal to the ordeal of seeing a woman in tears, so he tiptoed off the porch, ran to the fence and vaulted it and crept into the woods as one who has stolen something and fears he will be seen.

Before he had reached the camp-clearing he had come to the correct conclusion that the only way in which he could help Jim Lord was for him to find out for Daisy June, beyond any possible doubt, that Jim Lord had not killed Bill Aylett. It would be a Herculean task for a man, but that fact in no way daunted the boy. He had, he thought, an advantage in that he had a suspect in the person of Catbird Colyer.

THE sun had fallen behind the western mountains when he ambled, his hands deep in the pockets of his jeans trousers, over the dim path that cut the camp-clearing in twain. The Skeleton Creek crew was lounging here and there around the steps of the boarding-house porch, in waiting for the supper-call. Jim Lord stood in the boarding-house doorway, his eyes riveted on some far-off thing down the wooded valley, some far-off thing that he did not really see. He did not notice the approach of the barefooted boy.

But Catbird Colyer did. His mind was filled with but one thought, the remembrance of the affair at old Jephthah Aylett's. He rose, his eyes flashing with insensate anger and, as Bantam McEllery was about to set foot on the lower step, Colyer blocked the way for him.

"'Put that young 'un down, Bess, and grab that best hound pup!'" taunted the boy.

Colyer let out a wild howl that was half oath. With his open hand he struck the lad on the cheek and sent him reeling to a fall. It was then that the battle began. A red world flashed up before Jim Lord. He

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sprang like a panther across the porch, cried out, that he might not strike Colyer unawares, and put home a blow that drove the huge hillman staggering twenty feet from the steps. Colyer recovered quickly and squared himself for the next rush of Jim Lord, which was even then in effect. Now he would whip Lord, send him off in disgrace and win a job for himself. Wasn't he being forced into this fight? He certainly was.

Little McEllery rose barely in time to see his god deliver a pile-driver punch that might have snapped ribs of an ordinary man but only drew a swine-like grunt from Catbird. Colyer began a series of lumbering uppercuts, all of which, save one, missed their mark, but the one that landed bruised Lord's cheek badly. Then Lord came back with a terrific straight-from-the-shoulder blow that caught Catbird on the point of the chin and made the atmosphere for the moment purple to him.

"Go to it, Lord Jim!" yelled Bantam, beating his slouch hat against his knees. "Hammer 'im! Hammer his teeth into the back o' his neck, like pap used to do! Hammer 'im! Go to it, Lord Jim, old pal!"

Lord did go to it. He was burning his bridges behind him, and the devil could have the difference. Away with the molly-coddle job! He saw the futility of striking his adversary anywhere but in a vulnerable place, and he began to pick for the region of the solar plexus. Again and again he hammered Colyer around that sensitive portion of his anatomy, but Colyer refused to be whipped.

Lord himself took terrible punishment and he took it well. His face was covered with blood and grime, and a bone was shattered in one of his hands, but neither would he be whipped. Little McEllery kept shouting to his pal, urging him on, and it helped.

Then the fighters went to their knees, too weak and dizzy to stand, and fought there. Lord planted a hard drive to Colyer's face, and his other hand, too, was out of commission.

Colyer saw badly through a mist of red; his great clenched hands pawed holes in the air. Lord edged closer and struck sidewise with the point of his elbow. It landed at the base of the other's jaw and drew an involuntary groan, and Catbird, John Tom Colyer from Catbird Creek, gurgled out—

"I—got—enough!" With that he toppled over like a stabbed beef.

"Hit my boy!" cried the bloody-faced but triumphant Lord Jim. "You hit my boy! I reckon you got one that—nineteen—loggin'-locomotives—couldn't begin to pull off——"

Things were growing dim to Lord. He put his hands to the ground, his broken hands, that he might not fall. There was a youthful sob close to his ear, and Bantam knelt beside him with his slouch hat full of creek-water.

"You d-d-done it fo' me! You d-d-done it fo' me, old pal, didn't ye?" wept Wild Matt McEllery's boy. "I—I'm a wonderin' what ye'd do fo' Daisy June ef ye done this fo' me. Wa-wa-wash ye face, old pal?"

Lord Jim bathed his face and his hands and dried them on his blue bandanna. Then he rose and went into his little office in the rear of the commissary building, where he sat down at his scarred desk and wrote, with much difficulty, a letter to the man who owned the Skeleton Creek outfit. He had fought a fight that was not in self-defense, thereby violating his part of the contract, and was leaving in just three more days, if not sooner. The Skeleton Creek outfit, owner and men, so far as he was concerned, could go straight to blue blazes, lock, stock, ramrod, barrel and sights.

Bantam watched him as he wrote. When he had finished, Bantam inquired as to his plans for the future, and Lord told him unreservedly. Twenty minutes after that, when the twilight was fast being lost in the fall of night, little McEllery crept up to the honeysuckle-covered porch of the Ayletts and found a girl sitting there disconsolate and as still as an image in stone.

"Daisy!" he whispered from the steps.

"Yes?" she whispered back.

He went to her, knelt at the arm of her home-made rocker and gave a glowing account of the fight, and in his voice was truth—truth, worship for Jim Lord and pleading.

"Ef he'd do that fo' me—fight on his knees with his elbows when his hands done broke—what would he do fo' you, Daisy June? Fo' because he likes you better'n me; he said so."

"He said so?"

"He said so and he's a-leavin' mighty soon, Daisy. A-goin' over to Pigeon River

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for a job there. He'll never come back here no more. He said so."

It was the very highest card the boy could have played for his friend.

"Never comin' back here no more," murmured Daisy June.

"That's what he said. He ain't got nothin' to come back here fo', at all. Yander comes ye pap—so-long!"

Bantam stole out through the honeysuckles. As he entered the dark woodland, he heard Old Jephthah Aylett berating his daughter because supper wasn't ready—when there wasn't anything in the house to cook.

ON THE following day, a few minutes after the camp's dinner was over, Jim Lord and little McEllery took the trail that went down Skeleton Creek and to Laurel Fork and thence to the Pigeon River logging-country. They had covered some three miles, the dim path leading them through one of the deepest of green forests, when Daisy June Aylett, barefooted and bareheaded and in faded calico as usual, caught up with them. Lord and the boy halted and faced about in wonderment.

"Daisy June!" exclaimed Lord.

"I—I've left home, Jim," Daisy June said tremulously. "I—I cain't never go back."

With difficulty Lord held down the fine, bright hope that struggled desperately for life in his breast.

"Where are ye a-goin', Daisy June?" he asked her.

She flushed and then went a little white; she hung her head and began to toy absently with the end of her long, thick plait of brown hair.

"I thought," she began falteringly, "I thought ef you d-done what you d-done fo' this boy here, mebbe ye'd do even more fo' me, ef—ef you like me better'n him or anybody else. Do ye, Jim?"

"Do I?" cried Jim Lord. "Do I? I shore do!"

"Then I want to go wi' ye to Pigeon, Jim. I—I want to fo'git all that's done past and live only in the todays and tomorrows. I want ye to take me to a preacher and m-m-marry me, Jim. I jest cain't fight myself any more!"

Jim Lord, Lord Jim, caught her off her feet and kissed her the mountain-man's kiss of love and reverence too, on the forehead. When they came back to themselves again, Lord noticed that little McEllery, son of Wild Matt McEllery, Democrat and fighter to the bone, was nowhere around, and a sudden sad fear took hold of him. The McEllery hated women!

He raised his voice:

"Aye, Bant! Aye, son! Where are ye at, little pardner?"

From far up on the crest of a ridge came this, in tones that were not quite steady—

"So long, Jim, old pal!"

"Don't leave us thataway!" shouted Lord. "We want ye with us. Don't go!"

"So long, Jim!" replied the lad, and this time it came from a little farther away than before. "So long, Jim!"

Lord shook his head helplessly. With tears in his eyes he took the girl's hand and they moved off down the trail. He knew that it was useless again to ask the boy to come back.

"God be wi' ye, son!" he called. "And good luck to ye!"

"So long, Jim!" came faintly from beyond the ridge's crest.

The dust that had been Matt McEllery must have smiled.

Bantam soon set his face in the direction in which lay the logging-camp on Crooked Creek and, as he went, he thought of Lord Jim and the girl.

"So we've all, him and that fool woman and me," he observed, "burnt our britches behind us."

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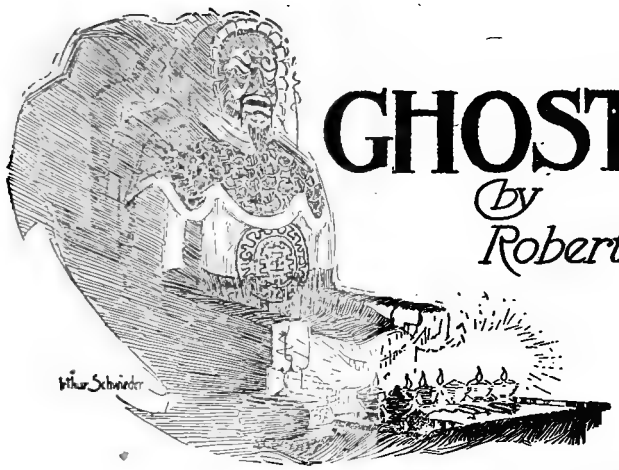

GHOST-RULED

by

Robert J Pearsall

Author of "Silver Sycees," "The Tablet of Shun," etc.

THERE still remain a few journeys to be made on this round earth where the traveler seems to pass not only through space but through time as well. All the way southwest from Shensi to the southern edge of that twisted and tormented mountain country where the Lolos rule and the Yang-tse has its mysterious beginning, Hazard and I had the impression of returning to the Middle Ages. It's true that we kept at a safe distance from the Lolo country itself, and also true that just then there was supposed to be peace between that hard-bitten race and the more pacific Chinese. But the fear of the Lolos was in the air; the talk of the Yunnan villages was all of their slaving forays, and every now and then we encountered bands of their free-riding warriors.

It was queer, in this twentieth century, to find a people whose whole disposition was reflected in these warrior bands—a people who, despising agriculture and all occupation save that of arms, lived wholly by the sweat of a captive population. *Nzemos*, nobles, serfs and slaves—such, we learned, were the four rigid castes of Lolo society, solving handily the Lolo economic problem. The latter two classes were, of course, made up of captured Chinese. All slaves became serfs after three generations of good behavior, but, in spite of that politic arrangement, it seemed that this captive population suicided rapidly and was unreasonably disinclined to reproduce its kind, showing that preference for death over slavery which has been one of the mainsprings of human action since the beginning of time.

Hence, of course, the dreaded slaving forays; hence the fact that the Lolos were willing to pay much good gold, which they dug up somewhere in their forbidden mountains, for the delivery of Chinese children. But the modern Chinese, from selling their offspring, had passed to defending them and themselves savagely, and Hazard and I half-circled Lolo-land without discovering even an indication of planned aggression.

That is, except for the story of the miraculous government of the village of Ning-Po, further south, and that I at first connected with the Lolo menace only from a habit I have of spinning a hypothesis around every unexplained circumstance. There is, as Hazard would say, only one possible cause of every accurately determined effect, and I had the additional theory that balked force naturally turns to trickery to accomplish its ends. The tale itself, which was that a dead mandarin continued supernaturally to rule his village, was such strong bait to my curiosity that I perforce spent much time mulling the matter over.

Consequently, when I discovered that Ning-Po lay below the point at which Hazard and I had planned to separate for awhile, I worried a little over the possibility of losing the chance for investigation. Ordinarily we flipped coins when it came to taking different routes, and I was grateful enough when Hazard, knowing my desire, voluntarily resigned Ning-Po to me.

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"But," I protested feebly, "the other route, by way of Su-Chuen, is two days longer."

"All the better," he smiled, "for that'll give you time to look into this thing, if it's worth while—which, as I've said, I doubt very much. You know the superstition itself is one of the oldest in Yunnan. According to belief, every dead man's spirit is permitted to meddle with earthly things for three years for good or ill. And when you get there you'll find the mysterious voice only the projection of some one's imagination."

We had little time to debate the matter. At the moment we were standing at the head of a great ridge, on either side of which the two valleys which we were separately to explore sloped downward under the pale, turquoise heavens from the heart of the mountains, their bottoms veiled by the damp mists of the morning. We had dismounted; but behind us our four *mafus*, aware by reason of the shifted baggage that we were to separate, watched us incuriously from the backs of their wiry Kansu ponies. It was the thought of the country back of them, black hills wholly unconquered and almost wholly unexplored, the stamping-grounds of the Lolos, from which might come anything, that made me reply hopefully to Hazard—

"Somehow I've a feeling that for once you're wrong."

At that Hazard chuckled a little, good-naturedly tolerant of what he was pleased to call my one weakness—my utter inability to resist the call of the unusual. Hazard's mind, on the other hand, was one that naturally clung close to every single problem until it was solved. Just now, of course, he was occupied wholly with the destruction of the Ko Lao Hui, that sinister, tyrannical union, millions strong, that threatened New China with ruin. I don't think his zeal was any greater than mine, but for me there were always bypaths opening.

"Well," he admitted, "this particular section of the world is very much like an old curiosity shop. Take the short way, through Ning-Po, and I hope you'll not be disappointed."

"At least," I replied, remembering something else we'd heard of that town, "I'll see another white man and a white woman. Where won't the missionaries go—male and female? Hazard, it's darn selfish in me, but——"

"Oh, the devil, Partridge; go ahead! Remember what I owe you from Sian-Fu. And, as for the rest of our plans——"

Very briefly we went over them again. There were a few mandarins in each valley who must be interviewed concerning Ko Lao Hui activities; certain other things that must be done; and at the end of the fifth day we were to meet at the village of Ki-Liang, where, by our maps, these two valleys joined each other again. To save time we often adopted this method of going by diverse routes to some meeting-place, thereby, no doubt, increasing our danger a trifle. But even one of only moderate courage becomes at last accustomed to danger. It's really the fascination of such an existence, reflecting only one's own will and preserved from day to day only by one's own strength and cunning, that makes the explorer, and we had the additional incitement of feeling constantly at grips with the malevolent society of the Ko Lao Hui.

Everything understood, Hazard called up his two *mafus*, gripped my hand in parting, mounted his pony and led off down the trail that followed a shelving slope into the eastern valley. I watched him out of sight behind a bend and then, feeling a little more the strangeness of this land, made ready to go my own way.

I'D JUST reined up my pony from browsing the short grass when a swift pounding of hoofs came to me from behind. Looking back, I saw something that caused me to order my men a little off the trail and to take up a position in front of them, my carbine unslung and resting in the hollow of my arm. It's always well to match the Lolo respect for the white man's arms with an equal respect for their shorter range weapons and to keep them well away.

They came down from the mountains in a swift gallop, about thirty of them, their small, agile ponies, sure-footed as goats, making nothing of the rough trail. With the points of their long lances, spears and tridents glittering in the brilliant morning light, sabers rattling, bows and quivers swinging on leather baldrics, red saddle-trappings dotted with little bone plates flapping up and down and long brown and blue cloaks floating out behind them, they

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reminded me curiously of an old painting I'd seen somewhere of a robber baron and his knights swooping down to despoil a peasants' countryside.

When they were almost up to me, their leader turned off along a narrow trail that led away to the west. The rest reined in their ponies and followed in single file. That is, all but a single horseman who swung out from the rest, flung his free hand up in a parting gesture and came on into the valley.

As he passed, he turned his face full toward me and gave me a long, assured look, startled, inquisitive, thoughtful. It was such a look as he might have given had he seen in me a possible unexpected factor in some plan he had in mind. As for me, I returned his scrutiny with interest. Savage slavers as they were, there was something fascinating about a people who, though surrounded by Chinese as by a sea, have managed to preserve complete racial separateness through a thousand years.

This man was over six feet tall, well formed, muscular, with nothing of the Mongolian about him. His skin was brown, not yellow; his large, fiery eyes were neither oblique nor flattened; his nose was aquiline and but for his color he would have passed for a Caucasian. A perfect horseman, he dashed by swiftly, and my two *mafus* drew closer together and muttered to each other uneasily.

"He goes to Ning-Po," said one. "*Ma ta-men yi peitzu.* May his generation be accursed forever."

That village of the dead man's rule, in which I was already so interested, was indeed the first town down the valley. Starting on, I wondered a little, not at the fact of the Lolo's visit, but at its purpose. It's an interesting sidelight on Chinese character that they allow this ancient enemy of theirs—into whose country it is death for any unauthorized Chinese to enter—free access to their villages, requiring them only to leave their arms at the gate.

Usually the Lolos enter only to barter their slave-produced goods, hides, honey and the eggs of the wax-insect, but this man had carried no such load.

So, busying my mind with that additional trifle, I followed down the trail at an easy pace, while the great Snow Mountains of Shama to the east and the white-capped ridges of Tibet far to the west sank slowly behind the black walls of the valley that was as yet little more than a ravine. But after a while the valley widened abruptly and I came out upon one of those garden places which have existed much as they are now from the beginning of China. The mist from the paddy-fields having by now been dispelled by the increasing blaze of the sun, I could see, perhaps twelve *li* ahead, the gray, rectangular wall of Ning-Po, within which it was probable the vanished Lolo had already passed.

Presently I was traveling along a narrow lane, bordered on each side by a multitude of tiny farms through which thread-like ditches ran everywhere in a silvery network, distributing the water from the hills. Here and there, scattered over these vegetable patches, were little red shrines raised high on brick-and-wood staging for protection from the floods. Everything was quite as usual except for one really remarkable fact. For once, something had interfered with the ant-like industry of the Chinese peasant; there were no workers in these outer fields.

This puzzled me until a little later I came upon them nearer the protective wall of the village—sun-browned laborers naked from the waist up but crowned with stiff-brimmed, conical hats; plowmen with their lazy water-buffaloes; women with babes on their backs. Then the explanation of the neglect of the more isolated fields was made clearer by the fact that near each group of these workers gleamed the shining points of a cluster of spears thrust upright into the ground, against which cluster sometimes leaned a rusty match-lock or Chines *jingal.*

Ning-Po evidently lived in fear, a condition not so very surprizing in a village near the Lolo country. More puzzling, however, in that primitive but ordinarily hospitable land, seldom neglectful of the chance for *cumshaw* which the white traveler brings, was the utter silence, seeming to veil some hidden antagonism, with which the workers nearest the road greeted my passage. Even the venders of hot tea and millet soup who had come out from the village to tempt these workers with their shrill, staccato cries let that feeling override their desire for gain and passed me by.

With a growing feeling of uneasiness—for these are bad signs where a missionary

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is stationed—I came at last to that which I later discovered was the one opening in the village wall. Beside it a rather villainous-featured gatekeeper squatted on his haunches, his back against the heavy wooden gate. He let me pass without a word, but was I mistaken in believing that, allowing for the difference in race, the look he gave me was much the same as the look with which the Lolo had favored me two hours before?

Now I, with my *mafus* close behind me, was in a narrow, winding street which seemed part of a labyrinth—a street bordered by tiny little houses of all sorts, mud, plank, bamboo and matting. Dismounting, I sent the *mafus* and ponies ahead to the village inn, to which a toothless old man sitting in a doorway had surlily directed us. Hospitality has its bonds as well as its advantages. My first curiosity concerning the ghostly tale I'd heard of Ning-Po had been increased by what I'd seen and I had determined to try the loosening power of silver on the tongue of a tea-house proprietor before visiting the missionary. Had I done so, things would probably have worked out much as they did, but chance hurried my understanding.

I WAS meditating upon the evident unfriendliness of a group of children playing *morra* on a street corner, when a white man and woman crossed the street about a hundred yards ahead of me. I started to call to them, with the thought that they were the missionary and daughter whom Hazard and I had heard were in Ning-Po, and then I checked myself. That was not entirely because a second look told me conclusively that the man was not the missionary nor the girl's father.

Nor was my hesitation caused by my first unfavorable impression of the man, though I've come to trust largely in first impressions. Anyway, all I saw of him was that he was rather short, heavily built, clad in a khaki hunting-costume, dark and sharp of feature and rather narrow between the eyes. Perhaps my instant dislike of him sprang mainly from the way he leaned toward the girl, who walked on the other side of him, seeming to talk to her insistently.

The thing that most impelled me to hold my tongue was the fact that just behind them, and evidently following them, judging by the fashion his eyes were fixed on the man, walked the Lolo who had preceded me into the town.

Coincidences sometimes explain such matters, but such are usually to be distrusted. The trio disappeared beyond the corner, and I was at that corner in a trice, looking after them.

Now I could at least see the girl's figure, a sinuous and yet robust figure, clad—rather remarkably for Yunnan—in a gray walking-costume fashioned somewhat unskillfully after a foreign pattern. She held herself erect—very erect—and there was a hint of settled impatience in her stride and the backward fling of her head.

The tall Lolo, walking rapidly, was almost upon them. It seemed that his approach attracted the white man's attention. Without stopping and without seeing me, the white man turned his head and looked squarely at the Lolo.

Was I mistaken in believing that there was both a warning and an imperative order in that look? The Lolo's conduct seemed to corroborate that impression. At once he checked his pace and, sauntering idly to the next alley, turned up it and was gone.

I strolled on a little farther, then changed my mind about interviewing the tea-house proprietors. It might easily be the white population of Ning-Po that I'd find most interesting. My inquiries concerning the mission brought forth surprizingly reluctant and ill-natured replies, but I gathered at last that it was straight across the town and made my way toward it, now more grateful than ever that Hazard had abandoned this route to me.

I'd not yet pieced together the scattered patchwork of partial facts that I'd discovered: the queer story of supernatural government, the presence in the village of the sinister-looking white man, the visit of the Lolo, the evident connection between the two, the undefined but apparent intimacy that existed between the ill-favored white man and the rebellious appearing girl, and the tense and anxious atmosphere in which all these things and the village itself were enveloped. But where there were so many things out of the ordinary there must be a way of dovetailing them, and, again, chance couldn't explain their coincidence. That was the conviction which I carried to my talk with Missionary Martin.

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II

"IT HAS been very successful, very successful," he told me with an undernote of uneasiness, after the formalities of meeting had reached the point when I inquired about his work. "Only of late," he went on, "there has been a lapse—yes, sir, merely a lapse which will, of course, prove only temporary."

"Of course," I agreed.

"You'll stay with us as long as you are in Ning-Po. My daughter and I— It's very good to have a visitor. The last party passed through here some eight months ago, I think. Or was it nine? Anyway, I hope you'll not be in a hurry to leave us."

"Thank you," I replied, purposely evading the question.

One rather unaccountable thing had already been explained to me—the presence of Missionary Martin's daughter in Ning-Po. Martin was a man of medium stature, with a square, rather stubborn face, prim lips, precise speech and the overbright eyes of the zealot. His mind was evidently well characterized by the study in which we sat—a bare, severely furnished room adorned with only half a dozen wall hangings of yellow silk on which were scriptural texts embroidered in white. He was, indeed, just such a man as might be expected to forget the pulsing desires of youth and his own human responsibilities in overmuch zeal for the heathen.

To do him justice, he had already expressed in a cool way his regret that his income as a missionary wasn't sufficient to support his daughter separately elsewhere. It had been rather hard for me then to repress the retort that it might be worth while for him to change the locality of his work.

At this point a servant fetched the inevitable tea and after sipping it I brought the conversation back to the subject that most interested me.

"You spoke," I suggested, "of a temporary lapse in your work."

"Ah, yes! It is unexplainable, absolutely unexplainable. It is a reversion, sir, on the part of the natives, to their false superstitions, or rather to one superstition that directly contradicts all my teaching, and in this case—I try not to believe in the power of the devil—it would seem that the devil is furnishing them with proofs."

"Oh!" I said, feeling that at least two of my patchwork pieces were knit together. "Perhaps I've heard something of it. Upcountry they call this village the 'ghost-ruled,' and of course I know of the superstition—borrowed from the Lolos, I believe—that the spirits of dead men remain on earth for a period of ——"

"Of three years exactly," completed the missionary with a strained smile. "Yes, that's it. They remain on earth and are permitted to interfere with earthly affairs; they have that length of time to atone for their ill-deeds in the flesh, so they may live happier in the hereafter. A heathenish doctrine, sir, and one that I've done my best to dispel."

"And now," I questioned, "it's seemingly been proved?"

"Seemingly—I'm glad you say that," replied the missionary half angrily. "For the effigy— You know, sir, it's the Yunnanese profane custom to make effigies of their dead for the temporary home of their spirits. They destroy them at the end of the third year. Well, a month ago the magistrate of Ning-Po died. A good magistrate, too, beloved of his village, and I had thought him a convert. But, before he died, Chang Li Pang—that was his name—made his own effigy in the audience room of the village. And now the effigy talks, gives orders and controls the village. It is a Satanic performance, sir."

"It talks!" I cried, incredulously.

"I've heard it," Martin admitted. "And it isn't ventriloquism; I'd know the sound of that. In a way," he concluded moodily, "I blame Dr. Rambeau, but——"

"Dr. Rambeau!"

I suppose the start I gave at the suggestion contained in his last words passed well for the surprize I would naturally have felt had I not known that another white man than the missionary was in the village.

"Ah, that's true. I hadn't told you about him, but you'll see him presently. He had the bad fortune——"

"Pardon me," I excused the interruption. "You were saying that he is connected in some way with this trickery?"

"My dear sir," protested Missionary Martin, "I'm sorry if I gave that impression. Dr. Rambeau's connection was wholly inadvertent. He was Chang Li Pang's physician and it was wholly in the ethics of his profession that he repeated the

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magistrate's last whispered words to the effect that he would continue, though dead, to rule the village through the effigy. He has often since expressed his sorrow that he assisted in the deception."

"I see," I said with my eyes on the floor. "Well, it's all remarkable enough and unfortunate enough for you. What puzzles me is the motive for this chicanery. I understand that the magistrate of a town like this is practically omnipotent, but, after all, there are few sources of revenue, and——"

"Absolutely!" he interrupted. "I get your point. No, there's been no attempt to profit by the situation. In fact everything goes on much as usual—Li Sing, who would naturally have succeeded Chang Li Pang, simply carrying out the latter's will instead of his own. The reason for the thing is plain, nevertheless. I have enemies, as any man has who carries the gospel into a strange land. It is simply an attempt to discredit me."

In that I took the liberty of disagreeing with him. If there had been Taoists in Ning-Po, if Martin had mentioned the arrival of a Taoist priest—mastery of jugglery and of all apparent supernaturalism as every such priest is—I might have accepted his judgment, but there are mental as well as other limitations to crime, and it would be strange if in the peasant village of Ning-Po there was a single man, save the one I already suspected, capable of perpetrating such a clever trick as this one seemed to be.

I thought, however, that I was beginning to understand the thing. In that I was doubtless assisted by the theory I'd formed days before when I first heard of the ghost-ruled village and connected it with the Lolo menace. It was really a very simple theory based on a very elementary observation of life. Nine times out of ten the creation or revival of a superstition that hasn't a natural basis has, instead, its basis in somebody's desire for easily gained loot, and there was but one possible form of loot in the agricultural village of Ning-Po, one thing possessing commercial value that might be stolen—the living bodies of the villagers.

So far I was fairly confident of my judgment, and certain other facts the missionary let fall before the return of his daughter and Dr. Rambeau helped to cement my conviction. Most significant was his careless statement that the only change in the administration of the village since the assumption of authority by the ghostly voice had been a change in gatekeepers and watchmen on the wall, bringing to my mind the curious look I'd received from one of them as I entered the village.

It was also interesting that, since his own first and last visit to the speaking effigy, a blanket prohibition had been issued against all white men and that even the Chinese had been forbidden to approach within ten feet of it. And of course I noted carefully in my mind the location of the *yamen*—just to the west of the one village gate. It seemed that the rear wall of the audience-room in which the effigy stood abutted closely upon the village wall itself.

My own plan, to force the denouement of the affair in time to keep my appointment with Hazard, was already beginning to shape itself, when there came the sound of leather-shod feet and English-speaking voices outside in the compound, and presently I was being introduced to the couple of whom I'd already caught a rather illuminating glimpse.

NOW MY life has, in a way, been a series of glimpses. Whatever else it has done, I believe that vice of curiosity of which Hazard was accustomed to complain has given me some accuracy at snap judgments. So it was that, even while I was bowing to them, I was reading into the quick, significant glance that had passed between the missionary's daughter and Dr. Rambeau the moment they became aware of my unexpected presence, something that enormously complicated what I had come to believe a rather simple problem.

It was a look of astonishment, but it was more than that—discomfiture, certainly, and perhaps fear, was in the eyes of both. I'd expected Rambeau, guiltily dreading any possible interference in his scheme, to betray himself in some such way. But was not the girl's similar expression really a surprized confession of partnership in his plan?

And yet her appearance fought against that thought. It is true that my previous impression of a nature simmering with discontent with her surroundings was accentuated by a closer view of her, and also true that her face expressed anything rather

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than a meekly submissive spirit. The strength for rebellion was in it, in her well-formed chin, her arched nose, her mobile, eloquent lips, her jet-black eyes, over-steady and with always the beginning of a look of scorn in them. She was strong, that was it, she was too strong for this thing of which I suspected her.

Rambeau, on the other hand, with his heavy-lidded, narrow eyes, his thick nostrils, his brutal jaw, had strength, too, but it was not the strength that would save him from utter vileness.

For a while we chatted inconsequentially. I gave the newcomers the same fanciful explanation of myself that I'd already given the girl's father—that I was a member of an exploring-party working in the other valley, a party which I would presently rejoin. At this the missionary flashed a regretful look at Dr. Rambeau.

"It seems as if it were a chance for you to leave us, doctor, but I hope you'll not avail yourself of it."

"I should take the first opportunity, sir," replied Rambeau doubtfully, while a glitter came and passed in his quickly averted eyes.

I glanced quickly at the girl and surprized a look of evident uneasiness on her spirited face.

Rambeau's tone had invited objection and, of course, he got it. During the colloquy that ensued, I got what purported to be the explanation of Rambeau's presence in the village. Two months before, he had entered the Lolo country with the second exploring-party that had ever attempted that inhospitable land, had become separated from his party while trying to discover a stray mule loaded with photographic supplies and after wandering for a long time had found hospitality in Ning-Po. It was a story that I might believe or disbelieve as I chose. It was such a story as a man would naturally tell if, for any misconduct, he had been compelled to abandon his party in haste or stealth, as my prejudice still convinced me Rambeau abandoned his.

Since his arrival in Ning-Po, it seemed Dr. Rambeau had really made himself useful in ameliorating the ailments of the village. It was on that humanitarian ground that the missionary urged him to stay, and at last, as was inevitable, Rambeau yielded.

"There's the present unrest in the village to think of, too. I wouldn't want to leave you while that lasts," he said with a glance toward the girl.

Now the glance was one of hypocritical intent, as his words had been, for the missionary's benefit. But truth is a thing that is hard to hide and I saw something in his look that he hadn't intended. For an instant, as his eyes rested on Miss Martin, a smoldering fire leaped to the surface of them and then disappeared. It was only an instant, a glimpse, like the first warning light in a volcano's depths, but it was enough to convince me that in any crime he had in mind the girl had her place. More, I thought it might well be that the crime was merely a short-cut to the girl.

"I'm sure," I put in, "Ning-Po should be grateful for your decision. By the way, I noticed that unrest you speak of—and fear, too. Mr. Martin's been telling me about a curious superstition. You don't suppose there's any danger of their becoming violent under its influence?"

"Well—" began Rambeau, doubtfully, but the missionary interrupted him with:

"Not to be thought of. But that fear you noticed is another very foolish superstition, sir. The bustards have left the town and——"

"They regard those birds as sacred," Rambeau completed the missionary's sentence, turning the matter off lightly. "When they leave it's a sure sign of a Lolo raid—absurd, of course."

"Of course," I echoed, matching his carelessness.

But inwardly I was tingling a little. Evidence was adding itself to evidence, for there are baseless superstitions and again there are beliefs that are regarded by the foolish as superstitions until science classes them as related phenomena; it took no science to know that this latter belief, prevalent throughout the Lolo infested country of Yunnan, might easily have a sound basis in fact. The Lolos are hunters; the Chinese are not. The meat of the bustard is good eating to a savage stomach and there could be no better indication of the gathering of a large force of Lolos in the foot-hills than the disappearance from the neighborhood of those big, ungainly birds.

"Well," I said after a pause, "it's all very interesting, but, come to think of it," I went on slowly, watching Rambeau out of

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the corner of my eye, "you'll soon be perfectly safe against any trouble. I forgot to mention that there's a detachment of infantry coming this way—Chinese Republicans, you know—two companies of them. We passed them in Tung-Ho four days ago and they're scheduled here day after tomorrow. One of their captains told me they intend to camp in the vicinity of Ning-Po indefinitely, to watch the Lolos."

In the middle of my speech, Rambeau's face twitched and his eyes narrowed quickly, as if something had pricked him. It seemed impossible that the missionary shouldn't notice this or the less perceptible change on his daughter's face, but he was one of the blind, good men of the earth who, by their refusal to see what is under their noses, often do more harm than the purely evil. Clearly, I thought, he would do better in some other field than Ning-Po; clearly the impending trouble, whose moment for breaking I believed I had fixed by my falsehood, might be a good thing if it only opened his sealed eyes to an ugly truth.

III

THE DAY passed, and the night and another day. That first night in Ning-Po I slept soundly, feeling as safe as ever I allowed myself to feel since Hazard and I had set our wits against the Ko Lao Hui. But the second night, after I had gone to the room on the west side of the mission compound which Missionary Martin had assigned me, I made but a single preparation to retire—one which the constant danger in which I moved had turned into a habit. Then, after allowing my candle to burn an appropriate length of time, I extinguished it, opened my door a trifle, spread a blanket on the earth floor and lay down on it with my head half outside the door, prepared for a long vigil.

I felt an unaccustomed lack of zest for the adventure I felt sure was ahead of me. I've always clung to my belief in the innate goodness of womanhood as a sort of moral life-preserver, but the last two days had seen that belief sorely strained. Impetuous as she surely was and strained to the breaking-point by the sheer unnaturalness and ennui of her life in Ning-Po, still there could be no excuse for Miss Martin if she were a partner in what I then knew to be Rambeau's plan.

There is, of course, no such thing as perfection of standards; human nature is as variable as the patterns on our walls and any of us may, under sufficient urge or stress, do almost anything at any time. I've long held that the only really bad are those who wish to hurt other human beings. But, if that is villainy, what of the man who, for gain of the gold which he was to receive no doubt after the accomplishment of the task, had agreed with the Lolos for the sale of the village of Ning-Po? What of the woman who became a party to that bargain, with the added guilt of leaving an unwarned and helpless father to an almost certain death at the hands of the marauders?

Of Rambeau's plan there could be no further doubt, unless I were willing to admit that events leaned more heavily than I'd ever known before on the arms of coincidence. I now had two other bits of fact to add to the chain I'd already formed—occurrences naturally consequent upon my prevarication concerning the approaching Chinese soldiery.

Very shortly after I had let slip that misinformation setting a definite time limit on his activities, Rambeau had excused himself with the plea of a waiting Chinese patient. A little later I matched his excuse by a pretended anxiety concerning my men at the inn. Half an hour later, loitering near the village gate, I saw the thing happen that I had expected. The Lolo who had preceded me into the town and of whose association with Rambeau I already knew, mounted his pony and rode off at breakneck speed into the hills. And today, early in the afternoon, I'd seen from the village wall a clear sign of the message I felt sure the Lolo had carried from Rambeau—a high and scattered cloud of dust rising above the hills to the north, dust that I knew well was made by a long column of horsemen. Li Sing, Chang Li Pang's understudy, had met with me at the time; he was an unusually intelligent Chinese who received well what I chose to tell him.

Yes, Rambeau was fiendishly guilty, and the very strength of his passion for the girl, of which I'd seen many later indications, seemed to prove that she shared his guilt. For how, except by making her an accomplice and spiriting her away before the

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attack, could he hope to save her from the rape of the town? He must know that any promise the Lolos might make to him would be swept aside in the lust and fury of battle.

Then there was that evident understanding between them which my later observation had only confirmed. It was but a double-edged and painful consolation to know that, on her part at least, it was not an understanding of sentiment. There was no softening in her eyes as she looked at him—rather a hardening, a look of calculation, mercenary even, as if she were driven by a desperate inner urge to an action from which she revolted.

So my reasoning went. It seemed sound to me. I condemned myself that I couldn't believe in it. The rule that one finds it easy to believe what one wishes to believe also works by contraries. Try as I would, and with all the evidence before me, I couldn't put the vibrant-voiced girl with the steady if impatient eyes and the imperious carriage in such a despicable rôle.

And yet I was sure that presently she and Rambeau would come out of their rooms on the other side of the compound and steal away in the night, before the scheduled Lolo attack—together.

However, they couldn't leave without my knowledge. In the Chinese language there's no such word as "privacy" and there is small provision for it in their architecture, but it was a dark night, moonless and cloudy, and I must keep well alert.

Probably it was because my attention was trained so absolutely on that which was outside my room that I failed to hear the beginning of the first event of the night. All at once, however, I became conscious of a stealthy movement somewhere—a slow, snake-like gliding, as of a stripped human body wriggling over an uneven surface. I listened a moment without stirring and then smiled in the darkness.

Another thing called for by my suspicions and the indisputable logic of events was happening. Rambeau, having bargained to deliver Ning-Po defenseless into the hands of the Lolos, was at least trying his best to fulfill his bargain. In a way it was a compliment that he thought well enough of my prowess to send an assassin against me ahead of the attack, for it could be only a would-be assassin that, having cut away the paper window that opened upon an alley outside the compound, was creeping naked and, doubtless, slippery with oil, as is the habit of the East, into my room.

Then it was that I blessed the single precaution I'd taken. That would rid me of this intruder without the noise of a struggle. Ever so slowly the fellow let himself down to the floor. There was an almost inaudible, cat-like padding of bare feet followed by a low, animal-like cry of astonishment and pain.

The man had, of course, stepped upon the poisoned tips of the wooden pegs with which Hazard and I always littered the floor of our sleeping places. Whether he sensed the truth, that he was about to be violently sick from them, I don't know. Anyway, the next minute he had rushed to the window, drawn himself hastily through it and was gone.

NOT TEN minutes afterward there came another sound—this time one I expected—the almost simultaneous opening of two doors on the opposite side of the compound. The doors were closed again, and the figures of a man and woman, darkly clad, moved like shadows against the lighter wall, toward the gate. As they passed under the light of the Chinese lanterns that hung over the gate, I saw with a sinking heart another vindication of my judgment. The man was, of course, Rambeau, and the woman Miss Martin.

I rose and followed them quickly, but when I reached the street they were out of sight. However, my hearing again served me; they had passed into a little alley leading toward the heart of the town and I was instantly tiptoeing after them, keeping close to the fronts of the houses and utilizing for my own concealment all the sharp corners that had been devised for the confusion of evil spirits.

Trailing is one of the several arts I've had occasion to practice, but they were moving very cautiously and so I had to keep very close to them. I was sure, however, that they did not hear me. Several times Rambeau stopped and looked back, but by the time he had turned his head I was flattened against a wall or in a doorway. Curiously enough, the girl neither stopped nor turned and, indeed, she seemed somewhat impatient of Rambeau's evident fear of pursuit.

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So they led me across the little village, moving through the labyrinth of alleys like those who well know both their way and their objective. Somewhere ahead of them a dog barked mournfully. There came the sharp clatter of a watchman's rattle, and then another and another—the sentry-calls of China. These sounds stirred a certain anger in my heart—also a certain satisfaction.

Half-way across the village I dropped a little farther behind. Now I wasn't afraid of losing them, for their course made their destination plain to me. Whatever their purpose, they were going straight to the *yamen*, the home of the mysterious effigy and the ghostly voice, around which all of Rambeau's plot had been built.

I had, however, another fear. As we advanced toward that *yamen* and the wall against which it was built, the deceptive silence, indicative of a town asleep and helpless, became disturbed by curious noises, subtle rustlings and shufflings, the undernotes of men moving stealthily and even the deeper breathings of groups of men asleep. I was afraid Rambeau would notice this, but, if he did, he must have placed his own interpretation upon it. It is true that a gathering of Lolos, closing in upon the gate and waiting for it to open, might have made some such sound.

Now, the wall within which Ning-Po had huddled for safety some thousands of years bulked darkly ahead of us, and a little nearer rose the lower wall of the *yamen* compound. Still without hesitation, Rambeau and Miss Martin passed through the open gate of the *yamen* compound. Reflecting that there was nothing surprizing about this, for whoever controlled the village through the trick of the ghost-voice controlled the *yamen*, too, and could rid it of occupants and watchers at will, I followed them into the outer compound.

Through this compound and through the second and the third they passed, with me trailing them. Finally they disappeared through an open arched doorway into what I felt must be the rear room of the *yamen*, the audience-chamber, the place of the miracle-working effigy of Chang Li Pang. Very cautiously, feeling my way by inches, I slipped in after them and backed against the wall to the left side of the door.

IV

THE ROOM was, of course, black as the pit. I stood there, my nerves highly strung, scarcely breathing and, if the truth be told, feeling queerly and rather painfully confused. Things had, so far, worked out exactly as I had planned and expected, and yet of a sudden I found myself bewildered by that very fact. I was like a student who has secured the right answer to a problem by a method which he is inwardly convinced is incorrect. This is not to say that I doubted all my reasoning, but I still did doubt, in spite of myself, that part which some illogical prompting within me made seem the most important part of all.

That illogical doubt was still further increased by the vibrant and excited but not particularly frightened and not at all guilty note in the girl's voice.

"Now for your proof, Sir Romancer," she said in a low voice.

"I'll give it," said Rambeau.

His voice was, in striking contrast to the girl's, hoarse and strained.

"You'll need light, then. You said there were candles here."

"There are— What's that?" Rambeau broke off, startled.

I had not moved, astonished beyond measure as I had been at this beginning of their conversation. It must have been merely the jangling of Rambeau's guilty nerves filling his mind with fancied danger. It could hardly be that he had heard that sound which I, who certainly have keener hearing than the average and who was listening for it besides, could barely hear—the low stirring which seemed to come from directly above us, but which was really the stirring of men on top of the village wall to the rear.

"I didn't hear anything," replied the girl. "If you haven't matches, I have."

Rambeau seemed to hesitate.

"All right."

He fumbled in his clothes, produced and struck a match which flared up weirdly. It revealed dimly the partial outlines of himself and the girl and, back of them, so faintly that it was the mere suggestion of a shadow, a more than life-sized effigy set very close to the wall—doubtless the after-death presentment of Chang Li Pang. Rambeau stooped and began to light the

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candles that stood on a low table like an altar just in front of the image, and as their flames struggled up one by one I began to see things more clearly.

I saw that the girl's eyes were riveted, not on Rambeau, but on the effigy, whose life-like Chinese countenance, inscrutable as the night itself, began to be slowly revealed. I saw that the effigy, which I had supposed to be standing, was really sitting in a great Chinese chair, the broad back of which, six feet across, paralleled the wall. I saw also that from the polished surface of that effigy the slowly increasing candle-light was flung back in a sort of green radiance.

As for me, with the suggestion of that green radiance upon me—what does a green polished surface always suggest in the Orient?—my breathing was now becoming very short and quick, so that I had hard work to keep it inaudible. I was tense with the mental throes of a new idea. In the fresh light of the few words I had heard pass between Rambeau and the girl I had suspected of baseness, I was swiftly, and with a sense of shame, reconstructing my ideas. Stupidly, stupidly I'd skimmed the surface of fact; I'd followed the obvious; I had not been able to imagine.

"Oh!" cried the girl, bending toward the effigy with intense and avid curiosity. "It is— Or is it——"

I had not been able to imagine the depths of Rambeau's crafty nature nor another tale than the true one of the imminent Lolo raid which he might easily frame to lure the girl that night wherever he would—a tale which he told the next moment in a single word.

"Jade!" he cried, pretended enthusiasm struggling with caution in his voice. "Worth, as I told you, a fortune—in fact, priceless."

What had not that tale meant to the girl, bound to the deadly life of Ning-Po by the sordid chains of poverty—that tale of wealth unknown even to the villagers themselves, of a thing worth a king's ransom standing there within reach, unguarded? What wonder the secret conferences, the secret glances, the fear of interference in the plan to which she had been tempted?

"Ah!" she breathed in sheer delight, stepping closer to the effigy. "A fortune! It's worth something just to see it."

Laughing a little in a half-hysterical fashion, she patted the effigy with her hands.

"I told you you'd be glad you came," said Rambeau stupidly, his voice husky with guilt-inspired fear, his frame trembling with some other emotion which seemed to brook repression no longer.

"But it's here," Miss Martin's voice sank discouragedly. "It's too big to carry away. I don't see how— You wouldn't tell me——"

"Ah, Sybil, no," Rambeau rejoined hoarsely. "I didn't tell you because— But I've planned a way. And it's tonight! Tonight, Sybil!"

"I don't understand," she said, recoiling from him a little. "Tonight?"

It was plain she didn't understand. She'd been tempted to fly with him—indeed, she was a partner in the crime of theft; but, as Rambeau suddenly began to pour out in a burning rhapsody the passion he had so long repressed, she shrank away from him and lifted up one hand in a warning gesture.

She was amazed, but I was not, for a sudden change from the posture of imploring lover to zealous protector would suit his plan well. By all evidence the Lolo attack should soon develop. His plan was to help her escape—just how wasn't yet clear—to hide her somewhere, to find himself a pretext that would enable him to go to the Lolo *nzemo* and receive the reward for his treachery, then to return to Sybil Martin and take her—well, somewhere. Black depths yawned beneath the girl and very grateful indeed I was that I had come to Ning-Po.

False as he was, at least Rambeau's madness for the girl was genuine; it set his face working convulsively and narrowed his eyes like a cat's; it swirled through his brain and out of his mouth in words that were no make-believe. I waited a minute while the girl stood as if stunned, but presently she drew back yet another step.

"No, no!" she cried with absolute avoidance and horror. "No, no!"

"But I love——"

That was a lie; he did not love her. I thought it my moment to interfere and, with my revolver ready, I stepped out of the darkness.

"You choose," I said rather prosily, "a queer moment to protest what should be a divine truth."

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V

CONSIDERING everything, it would be hard to imagine a happening more embarrassing and frightening than my unexpected appearance must have been to Rambeau. Perhaps it was a certain hardihood and the realization of the necessity for quick thinking that held him for a moment in his tracks, motionless and silent, but more likely he was simply struck stiff and dumb by absolute terror. As for Miss Martin, the cry she uttered was a curious mixture of astonishment, relief and anger.

"You! What are you doing——"

"Pardon me, Miss Martin," I said bowing. "I know this seems to need explanation—my following you here. Here is a partial explanation."

I shifted the revolver in my hand until I was griping it by the muzzle and, keeping my eyes upon Rambeau, struck the forehead of the effigy hard with the butt of it. The green tiling—very much like glass—of which the whole effigy was composed, shattered under the blow. Fragments of it flew everywhere. Swiftly I struck again and this time the blow broke clear through the empty shell.

Rambeau started toward the candles. I jerked the gun back, reversing it with the same movement, and covered him again.

"That's a parable," I said easily, nodding toward the effigy. "Or rather, it's a symbol—false and hollow like your protestations and broken—like your plans."

"What do you mean?" rasped Rambeau.

"Why," I said, "love's neither insult nor attempted ruin. As for your plans—Have you an idea yet," I asked the girl, "why he brought you here tonight?"

"Why, he said—" she began confusedly.

"I know what he said, but—" suddenly I turned savagely upon Rambeau. "What time's the Lolo attack to begin?" I snapped.

At that his face became distorted with an entirely overmastering fear. Until then I had been merely a dangerous disturber of his schemes; now I was full-fledged Nemesis. I was the messenger of a dreadful doom; I must have suggested to him the fate that might be his if I had told the Chinese all that my question indicated that I knew. He gripped at himself with his will, but the betraying panic that was in him could not be downed.

"Attack! What attack? I don't know——"

"Oh, pshaw!" I put his reply aside. "Do you suppose I'd be here if I didn't know your scheme? Didn't know that——"

I'd noticed that the force of my two skull-shattering blows had cracked the effigy in another place, just below the chin. It wouldn't do now to take my gun off Rambeau, but I lifted my left arm and struck the forehead again—a hard, swinging blow. At that the clay-and-fiber compound which reinforced the tiling parted and the battered head went backward until it struck the wall behind. In the gaping orifice in the throat of the effigy appeared something very like the flaring end of a metal trumpet.

Rambeau shivered and the girl cried out inarticulately, but I went on:

"Do you suppose I don't know that for a month you've planned to sell the village of Ning-Po—men, women and children, body and soul—to the slave-driving Lolos? And, incidentally, to abduct Miss Martin while making sure that her father died? Why it was plain to me almost from the first time I heard of this dead man's voice. What could it be but a trick, worked as we now see it was worked? Merely a speaking-tube running—well, say to some house just outside this *yamen*, where one of your hired Chinese assistants—traitors to their people—talked your commands into the other end of it."

By the look of desperation on his face I knew my easy guess had hit the truth, but with a sudden revival of defiance he snarled:

"What in —— does that speaking tube prove? Even if I worked it, which I don't admit, what could I do to——"

"The changed watchers at the gate," I said steadily. "All unreliable men, men that could be bought, as I discovered——"

"Oh!" gasped the girl in an extremity of horror and fear. "I see it now. He——"

"—— you and your guesses!" cried Rambeau in a burst of not altogether hopeless rage. "If you finish as brilliantly as you've begun——"

"I'll have the whole truth," I interrupted him. "But——"

"I want to go to my father," Miss Martin suddenly moaned. "I thank you, I thank you, but I want to go to my father."

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"Perhaps," I hesitated, "you'd better wait until——"

Of course I would have been glad to have her go—glad to have her escape from this scene, had it not been for the confusion that I felt sure would presently ensue in the streets of Ning-Po. I suppose neither she nor Rambeau had noticed it, but the subdued murmuring, stirring, breathing, shuffling, as of watching men, that had, up to a few minutes before, faintly penetrated the walls of the *yamen*, had now entirely died away.

This could indicate only one thing—a tension so great as almost to suspend animation. It was the pause before the encounter. The force which Li Sing had promised me should be on top of the wall to negative the faithlessness of the watchmen, should my suspicions prove correct, had at last sighted the stealthy approach of the Lolos. No, it was not a moment for Miss Martin to leave the *yamen* alone, and, as for me, I had a fancy to keep Rambeau there a little longer.

I had a vague hope that the problem of his disposition might possibly solve itself, for that was still a problem. Well as he deserved any punishment the Chinese might conceive, I had a prejudice against surrendering him to them. There's a sort of race feeling about such matters. In general, it's not good that white men should be punished by any other than their own laws. An accident might easily happen, and, besides, there was one thing yet I didn't understand.

Rambeau had undoubtedly brought the girl here that he might spirit her away from the Lolos. How had he hoped to get her away? I would stay until I had learned that, but Miss Martin was insistent.

"Oh, I must go. I must——" she cried distractedly.

And, suddenly breaking into sobs, she covered her face with her hands and started to rush past me.

Just then by what seemed merely a dramatic accident—for Rambeau had, of course, known the exact moment the Lolos would appear at the gate and had planned his rendezvous with Miss Martin accordingly—that for which I had been waiting happened. A single guttural shout split menacingly through the absolute stillness of the night. It was followed instantly by the thin rattle of the nondescript Chinese firearms and a burst of those shrill yells and dreadful maledictions with which fighting Chinese always stimulate their sluggish nerves and work up their slow but maniacal courage to the sticking point.

Miss Martin would have gone on in spite of that outburst, but I stepped in front of her, still keeping my pistol extended toward Rambeau.

"You can't go now. The streets——"

"But I must. My father——"

I was glad to hear the anguish with which she pronounced those last two words.

"Your father is quite safe," I assured her. "I've seen to that. There's no danger from the Lolos."

Indeed, that was certain, for the sound of the firing all came from the top of the wall and outside there was merely confusion. The Lolos had evidently crept close to the gate in a mass, leaving their horses at a distance to insure secrecy of approach. This formation would have served well, had the gate been opened to them as they had expected, but the change in program made it disastrous. Their cries were of consternation, while the cries of the Chinese became increasingly furious.

Perhaps Miss Martin sensed something of that, or perhaps it was only my words that reassured her, but she stopped, hesitated and then, her strength seeming to leave her, groped backward toward the wall of the *yamen* and leaned against it weakly.

"As for you," I began, turning my attention to Rambeau.

I stopped, checked by an inexplicable look of hope I saw in his eyes and by the fact that, during my words with Miss Martin—although I had had him covered all the time—he had managed to edge away from me until his left arm almost touched the broad back of the chair which supported the disfigured effigy. I stared at him, wondering what was in his mind and subconsciously realizing something else, too—that a group of the defeated and disconcerted Lolos was coming down outside the village wall, toward the *yamen*.

That latter fact was but natural, for the Lolos must have instantly realized that the wall under which they were huddled was to some extent a protection from the fire above and that their best chance lay in scattering along the bottom of it before breaking away into the open. And I think that, even before Rambeau made his next

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move, I had the glimmering idea of a connection between that approaching rush of those who had been his allies and his muscles tensed for instant action.

But what was that connection? What could he do? The Lolos were outside the village wall, which was outside the wall of the *yamen*. Rambeau was within both and in order to join them. . . .

But while I doubted Rambeau acted. Suddenly he sprang sidewise, behind the back of the effigy's chair, jamming himself in between that chair and the *yamen* wall.

He was out of my sight but an instant, not long enough for him to draw, and springing forward, I jerked my revolver down upon him. It was darker where he was, struggling frantically in the close embrace of stone wall and immovable chair, but I could have shot him easily—too easily. It was not, however, his grotesque helplessness that made me pause, nor was it altogether the inhibiting influence of a theory I've long held that the plans of villains of his type have usually within themselves the elements of annihilation. Mainly, I think, it was the noise of the panic-stricken Lolos coming down outside the wall that held my finger loose on the trigger.

So Rambeau would escape into their arms! Well, then, let him!

The next moment he had disappeared, as if the wall of the *yamen* had opened to receive him. He had indeed passed through that wall, into this avenue of flight evidently planned beforehand. And, still with that queer feeling upon me of an inevitable retribution toward which he was hurrying, I squeezed after him into the cramped space between chair and wall.

I faced an opening which had been made in the *yamen* wall and which the inviolateness of the effigy which screened it had no doubt shielded from discovery. If my theory of Rambeau's intention were correct, that opening must also extend through the village wall against which the *yamen* was built. But in front of me was nothing but blackness—and the sound of Rambeau struggling through the narrow passage.

I aimed my revolver into that blackness, but at that moment there was a crash of shattering and tumbling rock. Rambeau had flung himself against the thin, concealing shell he had cunningly left covering the outer end of the way which he had contrived to freedom. That shell fell outward and for one moment I saw his figure silhouetted darkly in the opening as he plunged out into the night.

I could still have shot him, but again I held my shot. This time it was not hope for a lack of necessity for that act, but certainty, for beyond him, faint in the darkness, wildly brandishing their weapons, were the flitting forms of many Lolos. And to them, mad with panic, seeing but dimly in the night, he could, of course, have been only an enemy rushing out to the attack.

Pity stirred faintly within me as I saw him throw up his hands, realizing his mistake. They flung themselves upon him. I think he cried out once as their spears ran him through.

A few minutes later, when all that remained of the Lolos was the sound of hoofbeats pounding away in the darkness, and when the fire of the always defensive Chinese was abating, I returned to the room of the ruined effigy. With the feeling upon me that there was one other thing in Ning-Po that needed to be done, I took Miss Martin's arm.

"Now," I said, "I will take you to your father. I have something to say to him."

There are, as I have said, types of human nature as infinitely varied as the trees in our forests, but through all of them there runs one common strain. There is one string in every human heart that may always be played upon. Had Missionary Martin been thrice the zealot that he was and one-twentieth part as good, I think he would still have listened to me that night, and I think I should still have had the news to carry to Hazard of a coming change in the personnel of the mission station at Ning-Po.

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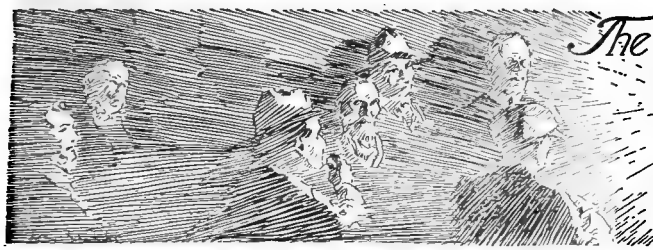

The Camp-Fire

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

OUR magazine is found in many strange places and sometimes there are interesting stories about how some comrade first met it, or the strangest place in which he has found a copy, or about the most traveled copy he knows.

Toledo, Ohio.

Know how I got my first *Adventure?* Well, I was out in the park with my cousin in the Winter and on a dare I climbed at the top of the "Speedway," a very tall skeleton of wood supporting tracks for a car to run on, and there I found an old copy of the magazine, tattered, torn and wet with slush. Well—that started me.—JACK ORWILER.

YOU will see that "Uncle Frank" is a bit sore. At least he was when he wrote the following quite a while ago; by now the soreness is probably only a memory, if even that. Anyhow Uncle Frank has given us many interesting talks and I imagine none of us will object to his growling a wee bit for once. It isn't a very fierce growl.

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

"Vieljo" questions my statement re "ropeing." The Dah Kotas and allies did rope. One Anderson was a well-known scout, latter 60's and early 70's and had a squaw some relation to Red Cloud. One of his sons, Andy, then a sergeant in 17th U. S. Inf., was talking to me at Fort MacPherson, Georgia, in 1904 or '05 and laughed when I spoke of "ropeing." "They don't any more," he said, "but I remember when they did."

Now some used a very elaborate system, others a simple thong. Individual taste, you know. But the thong was a symbol, as it were, as a chair tipped up against a restaurant table is also a symbol. Get the point? Ask Captain North. I think he was called Larry, but can't be sure after this lapse of years. No, you don't get me in any argument. Pigs is pigs and facts is facts.

ME, I dunno, not even what I *know*. Remember, "nothing is, only seems, etc?" Now, again I've chewed betel and have just one fang left, but I never chewed betel-nut. The "Camp-Fire" once published something I said on this subject. A native said, "*No, Don Paco* (We), *no se masca betel. Este es areca* (touching nut); "*este* (touching leaf) *es betel.*"

"No, Francis, they do not chew betel; this (nut) is areca and this (leaf) is betel. They called buyo here."

The areca nut, a slice (a nutmeg-looking critter is wrapped in a betel leaf smeared with oyster-shell lime and sometimes a shred of tobacco and chewed reddening lips and saliva and playing hob with teeth, but is claimed to be good for the *estomaca*—"tummy." Mebbe so, mebbe no so, I dunno, but of "ropeing" I do know and so does any old-timer who lived with the Injuns, not merely resided with them.

AT "ISSUES" on receiving a pair of pants the buck would immediately cut the seat and front, converting them into a pair of leggings supported by the waistband. Now stand on your hind legs, you closest naturalists, and say "That's not so," because you mebbe saw one turn 'em over to his squaw to operate on and thought that was all.

I struck the frontier in '66 and left it for good after the big pow-wow in Cheyenne in '81 or '82—forget which. Some one will tell me next that never occurred and that Standing Elk never used to catch the train as it was pulling out and leaving him or that every Injun in sight whooped and howled and yelled and danced in encouragement or derision or pure devilment as Elk bounded for the train and the California-bound homeseekers thought another rising had occurred. Some one will tell me that the Injuns never had free rides on car platforms and steps through a treaty permitting rails to be laid through their reservations.

I'll wake up some day to learn that I never saw an Injun.—FRANK H. HUSTON.

OUR Camp-Fire "stations" have brought in a good many letters of strong endorsement and we have already published a list of those who gave in their names at once, as willing to conduct stations, without waiting for final details to be arranged. Other volunteers have come forward since then, some of them from outside the United States, and more will be speaking up right along.

The holding up of our magazine by the strike has prevented responses from coming in so fast as they would do under normal conditions and the whole plan has thereby been delayed. Help it to make up for lost time by sending in your name for a station and by getting any suitable man you know to do the same.

It's a big idea and will spread rapidly enough once it's well started. Do your part by helping it get a good start. If

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you are interested in the plan, don't just sit back and wait for other men to start stations for you to use, but do your part too.

HERE'S the general idea for stations, subject, always, to changes if desired.

A station may be in any shop, home, or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a station shall display the regular station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and provide and preserve a sufficiently substantial register book. When there are enough stations to warrant even a small wholesale order this office will furnish the books and signs.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause or complaint from members, a station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A STATION bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to condition of trails, etc.; resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above station privileges. (Question of requiring identification-cards or Camp-Fire button to be decided later.) Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

A station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members is excellent.

THE adventures and travels of some of our identification-cards are certainly worth hearing—this one, for example:

Seattle, Washington.

In reading Camp-Fire of August 3, 1919, I came across a letter by comrade Sapper Roger F. Gardner, No. 749285, 12th Canadian Railway troops, regarding his identification-card and thought perhaps some of the readers of Camp-Fire would be interested in another of the same kind. I have carried my card No. 5476 for a number of years both on land and sea—all of the five extreme Western States, different ports of Alaska. In 1917 I enlisted in the Royal Engineers at Seattle, Washington. Went to Vancouver, B. C.; thence to Montreal; Glasgow; Sandwich, Kent, England; Sierra Leone, West Africa; Cape Colony, S. A.; Bombay, India; Basra, Mesopotamia; through the campaign on the River Euphrates; invalided to Egypt; back to England; Halifax, N. S.; New York, Boston, Chicago, Seattle, and still have it before me as I write, in good condition, proving the good quality of which it is composed. While I and it have not been under fire as often as comrade Gardner, I believe we have wandered more miles together.—E. K. IRVING, No. 554,220, Royal Engrs.

A CALL to Camp-Fire for an old river-driver's song:

Cambridge, Mass.

I wonder if any woodsmen in the Camp-Fire can give me the words to that old river-driver's song "Guy Reed?"—THOS. B. STEWART.

MANY of you will remember *Fulvia*, the warlike Norman girl whose adventures in Sicily gave us a number of stories by Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur. In their novel in this issue we meet her again, and Mr. Brodeur tells us something about the times and conditions in which she lived.

Berkeley, California.

In the decade between 1134 and 1144, Roger of Sicily was engaged in a long and bitter war with the German Emperor, who invaded Italy again and again, and laid waste the greater part of Roger's Italian possessions. Sicily itself was not directly threatened; but it would have been had Roger's cunning as a statesman and his courage as a soldier not robbed the Emperor of the fruits of the German victories. Roger's problem was a two-fold one: he had to stand off the most powerful military state in Europe and at the same time to keep his own possessions in Italy and on the Sicilian island in order. The turbulent Norman barons repeatedly revolted from him; their cities and strongholds were fortified against him, and many of them made common cause with the German enemy. Brigandage flourished, and the King's sword alone kept his oldest possessions faithful.

THE only part of the population on whose fidelity he could count was the Moslem element, the descendants of the very Arab conquerors of Sicily whom Roger's father and uncle had overthrown. By a policy of wise religious toleration Roger won the love of his Mohammedans, who fought in his army abroad and at home, side by side with a few trustworthy Normans, and served the King in all branches of his government.

But Roger, by the extremes to which he went to win the favor of his Moslem subjects, incurred the charge of being a half-hearted Christian and an enemy of the Church. The Pope denounced him for his inactivity in the Second Crusade (1147-9), and he was accused of contributing to its failure by his refusal to take part in the Crusade. Between 1144 and 1149, he was engaged in constant intrigue and negotiation to secure himself against Conrad, the German monarch, who, he knew, would hope to attack him again as soon as the Crusade was over. Conrad made an alliance with Manuel, the

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Byzantine Emperor, against Roger; and but for the brilliant naval achievements of George of Antioch, Roger's admiral, the alliance would have declared war on him in 1149, the date in which our story opens. By a daring raid on the Greek coast and Constantinople, George broke the spirit of the alliance and secured the safety of Sicily.

IN THE meantime, between the end of his wars with the Germans and the opening of the Crusade, Roger held a meeting of all the barons under him, at which he browbeat even the most rebellious of his subjects into recognizing his authority. After this, all was quiet in Italy and Sicily both. Brigandage was at an end, and both Christian and Moslem subjects were content. But a fresh danger threatened.

The Berber Abd-el-Mumin, Ibn Tumart's successor as prophet and caliph of the Almohad sect, invaded Spain from Northern Africa and speedily subdued the Almoravid Moorish rulers of the peninsula. After Spain was in their hands, they began nibbling at Roger's possessions on the North African coast, between Tripoli and Barca. George of Antioch held them off for as long as he and Roger both lived; but in 1153 Abd-el-Mumin, who was both caliph and "Mahdi" of his fanatical, heretic sect, took every inch of Sicilian territory in Africa and for a time threatened the island itself. The Almohades were what we should call Unitarian Mohammedans: they declared against worship of saints and of the attributes of Allah, recognizing Allah as one; and they were ascetic in manner of life. The fervor of their faith made them more dangerous than any hashish-doped assassins that ever lived.

WE HAVE taken liberties with historic fact in making them attack Sicily during Roger's life, and in representing them as a peril to the heart of Sicily. That is, we have anticipated their attack four years, and have made it much more serious than it actually was. Of course, *Ian Dhu Mackay* is pure fiction, though the quarrel between Angus Mackay and King David of Scotland for the throne is historical. There were Scots on the Second Crusade; we have merely brought them back *via* Sicily and used them there. The Mackays, in the early twelfth century, were a seafaring clan; their possessions included all of what is now Moray, Ross, Elgin, and Cromarty.

They actually used—like all Highlanders of the time—the huge broadsword; though for purposes of fiction we have had to represent these terrible weapons as shorter than they really were. No one would have believed us if we had told their true size. When I was last in New York, in July, 1916, I saw one of these old Scottish broadswords—the true claymore—in the Metropolitan Museum. It is probably there now, for the skeptical to examine. The sight of it makes one realize what the Scots must have been in those days. The average modern athlete would do well if he succeeded in raising one of these swords as high as his waist.

WHEN the hero arrives in Sicily, we represent him as precipitating the Almohad invasion a little ahead of time, since the Mahdi allows his plans to embrace the killing of *Ian Dhu*. The trouble Roger has to face is no longer one of revolting Norman barons, and *Fulvia's* peril is no longer from outlaws or unscrupulous Normans; but the danger to both is the Mahdi's army and fleet and the revolt he attempts to stir up, through his agents, among the ordinarily loyal Moslem population. We have tried to show the natural struggle between the real loyalty of the native Moslems and their natural tendency to succumb to fanatical teachings.

Roger's inaction in the face of danger is not historic. He was an exceptionally wide-awake monarch. But he was the very man to ignore any peril that came from such a source as secret Almohad intrigue, because of his great confidence in Moslem integrity. He actually did not realize the danger of the Almohad conquest in Spain, and therefore we figured that he would hardly have been willing to accept any but the most startling evidence of intrigue among his Moslems in Sicily.

Christodoulos, the renegade, is the subject of much dispute among historians. Crawford depicts him as a villain and potential traitor; Curtis declares he was a faithful and honest official. Between the two, we have chosen Crawford's account of him; but little is really known about Christodoulos, and we warn you that we may be doing an injustice to him.—ARTHUR G. BRODEUR.

P. S.—You may have some doubts, in examining this story, about the use of divining-rods. The Encyclopædia Britannica states that though an explanation of the working of the rod is impossible, the consistent and repeated success of the instrument in locating water is so certain as to make reasonable doubt impossible.

CERTAINLY there is no slacking of interest in "What is the spirit of adventure, biologically speaking." Here is a definition from one of us who has wandered quite a deal:

MEMPHIS, TENN.

What is the Spirit of Adventure? In approaching the question, "What is the religious sentiment?" Spencer finds two alternatives: the one, that the feeling resulted, along with all other human faculties, from an act of special creation; the other, that it, in common with the rest, arose by a process of evolution, a result of intercourse of the organism with its environment. Observation has convinced me that the Creator accomplishes no thing directly, as we comprehend the word, but, on the contrary, produces an environment which in turn produces the desired result. Therefore, Spencer's two alternatives, to my mind, are only one, for the latter would merely be the process of the former. In other words, the feeling, if produced by "intercourse of the organism with its environment," still would be an act of special creation, the Creator merely employing the environment to register the impressions that would bring the mind to the desired state. Whatever the First Cause, we classify the feeling as a normal human faculty.

Might we not then assume that the Spirit of Adventure is as normal as the other faculties and, *in its office*, is a feeling of Divine origin, designedly responding to the Creator's system of dispersing man—physically, mentally and spiritually—from his original common center for the achievement of the divine purpose, whatever our respective (and respected) ideas upon that purpose may be, and that

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the getting of food, mates, etc., was and is merely incidental to the achievement of the ultimate purpose?—G. C. RUBLE.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, Carl Clausen rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

I was born in Denmark some twenty-odd years before that country was discovered by Doctor Cook. As a people we Danes are a seafaring nation. In every large family there are usually one or more who chose the sea as a livelihood.

I WAS the one of our family to be sacrificed upon the altar of Neptune. For some ten years I knocked about the Western Pacific—Australia, the Fijis, Gulf of Papua, New Zealand and South Africa. I was shipwrecked three times, twice on the coast of New Zealand and once off Delagoa Bay, South Africa.

In that ten years I followed fishing, pearl-fishing, copra-trading, not to mention a fling now and then at land occupations such as opal-miner, gum-digger, structural iron worker, window-cleaner and —opera-singer. In the last-named occupation I got as far as high C and then quit out of consideration for my friend Caruso. He's getting along in years, and I don't like to take a job away from an old man, so I turned my attention to "literature." I'll say, however, if I ever take up singing again, I'll sing like Caruso. I like his method—and salary. Also Mr. Caruso generally sings in a language I don't understand. Singing in a foreign language is so romantic to the audience, and I like my audience to be romantic about me.

I should like very much to know the whereabouts of Robert Burns—no, not the poet; I know where *he* is—but an old shipmate of the same lyrical nomenclature. I saw him last in Graymouth, New Zealand, in 1903. If "Scotty" happens to see this, please address F. A. Jones, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York, who will forward my mail. Also I would like to hear from Dick Tomlinson, last heard of in Moana, New Zealand. If either of these men will jog his memory, they'll recollect a certain trip on foot across New Zealand in 1902.—CARL CLAUSEN.

STILL another bit of testimony to the fact that there is a disease that in rare instances turns Indians white, as presented in one of our stories by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton:

Blackfoot, Idaho.

I want to say a word about Indians turning white, which some folks seem to doubt, but it sure is a fact. I have seen some myself among the Navahos. An old friend of mine, chief of police Santa Vall—I don't know if that is the right way to spell it—anyway, half his face was white in patches when I last saw him, and he is not the only one I have seen. And it does not pain or trouble them in the least.—L. H. ANDERSON.

A LETTER from a woman comrade with the spirit of adventure—a woman who still "keeps going":

Denver, Colorado.

This is my first letter to Camp-Fire, and I am only a traveler not an adventurer. Being a woman, I stay closer home. Once upon a time—"Tell it not in Gath"—I did actually beat it on a freight train. I rode the rods from Jocatella, Idaho, to Ogden, Utah. Won't my women friends raise their eye-brows when they hear of this! I have been round the world a number of times and still keep going. I keep to the cities and the countries where I can find English-speaking people; then there is no difficulty in working my way.

I have so often seen in Camp-Fire letters the names of boys who have soldiered with my uncle, Col. Robert L. Hirst, late commander of the Third Infantry.—DOLORES LEIDEN.

HERE is a question from E. E. Harriman of "A. A." and our writers' brigade. He wants information on a snake. Also he gives us an example of what an old-fashioned squirrel rifle could do, with the right man behind it, in the way of good shooting. Were they better marksmen in those days and in America's still earlier days, allowing for difference in weapons?

Now that you fellows have begun to talk about snakes (rather late in the day to bring it up when we've gone dry), I want to ask the bunch to identify a little one for me.

WHEN I was twenty years old I worked for a cousin of Nick Longworth on the north shore of Big Lake, Wright County, Minnesota. I went home Sunday mornings, pulling a heavy skiff two miles across the lake and walking three-fourths of a mile through the woods. Late in the afternoon I would return to my job under Octavius, Junior.

One Sunday afternoon when I was on my way through the woods to reach my boat, sober and in my right mind, I found a little snake on the dead leaves, trying to avoid my number tens. I whipped out my knife, cut a snake-stick and pinned him. He was only about a foot long, no thicker than a pencil, pale blue in color, with copper-colored belly. The anterior two inches of his tail looked exactly like one of the brown thorns from a wild crab-apple tree, dark brown, running off to a needle point. This tail was darting, not whipping, at the stick, just as a scorpion strikes or as a hornet darts his stinger.

I picked a large leaf and held it between stick and tail and he punctured the leaf neatly, making minute round holes that looked wet around the edges. I used a second stick and raised him to a large log for further observation. I took a fresh leaf and bent to get a side view of the action. That tail curved over backward and darted straight through the leaf, sticking into the fresh, green bark of the forked snake-stick at each plunge. It made holes such as a cambric needle might have caused. I killed the creature and left it there.

WHAT was it? Not a jugsnake, since alcohol and I were never intimate. Anyhow, who ever heard of a jugsnake letting himself get caught?

I have always understood that jugsnakes were coy critters, always wriggling just beyond reach of the

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canes, books, chairs and cuspidors hurled at them.

I have heard wonderful tales of hoopsnakes, but he did not fill the description of a hoopsnake, that product of the imagination run riot. That he was real, an active, wiry, mad little devil I know. That he did use his tail as a weapon, and not with the thrashing, whipping motion of a snake that is merely seeking freedom, I know.

What was he? Wake up, *compadres*, and tell me.—Fraternally, E. E. HARRIMAN.

P.S.—About long shots—my father saw a warrior of the Sioux nation at Greenleaf, Minnesota, in '63, with a bullet-hole in the solar plexus and the bullet stuck in his spine, sent from a Kentucky squirrel rifle of the thirty-to-the-pound type, from exactly one-mile distance.

The commandant of the post testified that he and two lieutenants watched the buck on a bald hill one mile away, with telescopes, while the hunter loaded and fired from a prone position on a sloping plank. The Sioux slumped and the captain sent a detail to bring him in.—E. E. H.

THOUGH this is his second story, not his first, in our magazine, Robert J. Horton follows Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself:

Milton-on-Hudson, N. Y.

Ten years in the newspaper game as all kinds of a reporter, correspondent, rewrite man, copyreader, sporting editor, city editor, telegraph editor, and other kinds of an editor, have instilled in me an abhorrence of the capital *I*. But this seems to be an occasion when the personal pronoun can not be avoided; hence the alibi.

ONE of the first recollections I have of Coudersport, the beautiful little town in north central Pennsylvania, in which I was born, is of a desire to find out what was beyond a hill west of town. Eventually I got to the top of that hill, only to discover that my travels had just begun, for I saw other hills and wanted to know what was on the other side of them. And I'll be doggoned if I haven't been finding out what is on the other side of hills ever since.

It's remarkable how many hills I've encountered; and they keep getting higher!

A MORE or less desultory schooling in a good high school in my home town and a mediocre preparatory school in New Jersey prepared me for my first real job, which was writing advertising in a New York department store. I hate to set this down; it sounds so commercial! But it paid well. I've never hated to tell people about the money I made in the advertising game. That's funny, isn't it?

Right here we may as well get down to cases on one subject—"art." I've listened a lot to the boys with the flowing neckties talking about their "art," but my definition of art is *work*.

Twelve years ago the West called. It seems ages (I'm thirty-four years old) since I boarded the Southern Pacific steamer *Momus* on a New Year's Day bound for New Orleans on my first trip west. I took in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California that trip, and "took in" is right.

THEN I broke into the newspaper game. I've worked from Park Row to Market Street and from Houston, Texas, to Great Falls, Montana. I've been out with Roosevelt, Hughes and McAdoo; I was a "war" correspondent on the Border; I was a correspondent for one of our greatest news-gathering agencies at a number of Texas cantonments and just missed going across during the war by a hair; I've "covered" State political conventions, legislatures, speeches, celebrations, floods, wrecks, forest fires, murders, baseball games, fights and most everything else that falls to the lot of news writers and gatherers.

My newspaper experience convinced me of three things:

1. It's a great game and a thankless one;
2. We've got the greatest country on earth and one to be thankful for;
3. People are pretty much the same everywhere and mostly good.

I've held some mighty good jobs, but none for any great length of time. The wanderlust has found me a willing victim. I went West to see the country out there and I saw it. I kept moving around. The old adage has it that "a rolling stone gathers no moss." But if experience and material can be called "moss" for a writer, then I've gathered tons of it. I have sufficient local color alone to decorate several hundred stories and now if I can just convince the editors—but that's another matter, of course. Everything in its place.

I HAVEN'T always been engaged in white-collar occupations, either. As a matter of fact, I don't lean to white collars at all. I'm quite a bit of a roughneck, old tops; and if any of you boys happen along on my camp sometime you'll hear anything but book-talk and see anything but a highbrow.

I've unloaded bricks in Pennsylvania, hopped bells in New Jersey, piled linens in New York, jumped lunch-counter in Kansas, seeded wheat and shocked it and loaded it onto bundleracks and helped thresh it in Montana; I've picked peaches and tomatoes in Utah, cut corn in Idaho, gloomed apples in Washington, and thrown slabs out of a sawmill in Oregon. These are not hard jobs, but if you understood the combination of circumstances which brought them about you would also understand why they are among my most treasured and interesting reminiscences. I mention them merely so you can know that my viewpoint of life in general is not framed by mingling solely in stiff-collar sections.

I've crossed and criss-crossed the West for the past ten years. I've ridden over it in Pullman cars and on top of them, in automobiles, on horseback, and walked miles and miles of it afoot. I love it. And of all the West, I love Montana the best.

Once when my eyes went back on me I beat my way—tramped, hoboed, bummed or whatever you want to call it—from Ogden, Utah, to Seattle, back across the Cascades and down the Columbia to Portland, from Portland to San Francisco, from the Golden Gate to Los Angeles, across the San Bernardino Mountains and Desert to the Imperial Valley and Yuma, across southern Arizona and New Mexico to El Paso, and from there on a cattle train to Kansas City.

I wouldn't take ten thousand dollars for my

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experiences on that jaunt. I saw things a man never could see from a Pullman car; heard things that are proving invaluable to me every day. And that trip taught me something I needed very much to learn: It's the little things that count.

I'VE hunted every species of big game in the United States and killed most of them. I've spent months at a time in the mountains of Montana, and I'd have you know that Montana's mountains are not tame. I've fished in practically every great fishing stream in the West; I've been lost in a blizzard, nearly drowned in the ocean, almost killed a dozen times. I've been in jail, too —but not for long.

I took the whole course.

I obtained the material for my first story in Southern California, wrote it in Tucson, Arizona, mailed it in El Paso, giving a Montana address, received the check for it in Kansas City, and was in Omaha when it appeared on the newsstands.

I'D RATHER write about the West than anything I know of; hence "The Gulch of the Lonesome Winds." This is a story written about a locality. The setting is authentic, as the gulch and the "sink hole" exist in the Little Belt Mountains of Montana. The story has no hero and the somewhat weird touch was suggested by the extraordinary effect which the spot had on me while stalking deer there. I've listened to those winds.

This is the first of a series of stories of the high hills which I intend to write and into which I hope to put some of my love for them and portray some of the amazingly interesting characters which abound in them.

I am writing this in the East, but by the time it is published I expect to be in a cabin in the Montana hills. You must know this about me: I claim that the successful man is the *contented* man, whether he is a millionaire leader of industry, or a trapper near some pine-fringed lake. If he is satisfied and contented, then he is a success. Other people may not view him as such, but, after all, isn't success a matter of individuality? Whom does it affect the most?

The story of mine which won the best press notices, brought letters of praise from readers and requests from editors, was laid in the East and concerned an Eastern hero. But it was conceived and written in the Far West.

So maybe my philosophy will work out all right in the Western shack. But whether it does or not, I'll have fresh trout for breakfast, and other game in season. And I can drink in the scent of the pines and flower-splashed meadows and see the moon shining on the peaks. Perhaps you do not realize this, but it is quite a thing just to see the moonlight on the peaks. *I* think so. And if you're ever round my way, drop in; you'll find everything except a lock on the door. So long.—ROBERT J. HORTON.

MORE about Billy the Kid from a comrade whose name is known to a good many of us through his stories. Mr. Poe, to whom I wrote, tells me that his account of the killing was sent to a writer in New York some time ago and as it has probably already found its way into print I have not followed the matter further.

Long Beach, California.

I have just been glancing through your Camp-Fire and can throw some light on the matter of Billy the Kid's death.

TWO years ago I spent some time in Lincoln County, New Mexico, gathering material for my novel "A Man Four-Square." While in Roswell (which, by the way, is not now in Lincoln County) I talked with many people who knew "the Kid"; also in Lincoln and on the Ruidosa I talked with several others. Among those I met was a Mr. Poe (I think John Poe), a banker of Roswell, N. M., and an absolutely reliable man. Mr. Poe was sent out from Texas by the Cattleman's Association to try to stop the rustling that was being done from New Mexico. He cooperated with Garrett, discovered where Billy the Kid was staying, and was with Garrett at the time he shot "the Kid." Later he was Garrett's business partner and succeeded Pat as sheriff of the county, elected to stamp out lawlessness, which he did.

Poe is a modest man and rarely talks of his exploits, but he told me one evening the story of the killing of "the Kid" by Garrett. That story, within a few days, upon being urged by me to do so, he put on paper and had some typewritten copies struck off. One of these he sent to Colonel Goodnight (of the famous buffalo and cattle ranch in the Panhandle, Texas). I know this because when I was at the Goodnight ranch next year Colonel Goodnight handed me the manuscript to read. The story was exactly the same as the one Mr. Poe had told me, and it is undoubtedly the true one, since he was on the porch, within ten feet of both men, though not in the room, when Garrett shot. The only other man in the room was Pete Maxwell, now dead, and Pete was very much on the way out of the room at the moment the shot was fired.

I FOUND persistent rumors in New Mexico to the effect that Billy the Kid was not killed by Garrett but is living on a ranch in Arizona. There is of course no truth in this and it is proabaly due to the fact that Billy has already become a traditional hero like Robin Hood.

Poe's story is in substance like that of Garrett, though details differ. Garrett's story can be read best in Emerson Hough's book, "The Outlaw." There is no occasion whatever for any substantial variations of the account of "the Kid's" death. These are due to writers sending in accounts based on rumor and gossipy details gleaned from casual narrators. One point that has perhaps tended to mix writers is the fact that Garrett captured "the Kid" some months before the time he killed Bonney (the Kid's name). On this occasion his posse shot down some of the Kid's lieutenants. After being convicted of murder Billy escaped, killing his two guards, Bell and Olinger.

Billy the Kid is the most famous outlaw the West has produced, with the exception of Jesse James and possibly one other. Why not get Mr. Poe's story while he is still living? It is short, clear, and entirely accurate.—WILLIAM M. RAINE.

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LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

WE, THE greater part of the American people, sit helpless and complaining and watch Capital and Labor battling with each other. Each claims it is fighting for its rights. But down in our hearts we know the *we* are the bone these two dogs are fighting for. We realize more and more clearly that both Capital and Labor are fighting not only to be the conquerer of the other but to be the *devourer of—us?*

For what is there to fight about except the profits that can be squeezed from *us?* When Capital wins, more money goes from the pockets of the many, our pockets, into the pockets of the few. When Labor wins, Capital passes the cost on to *us*. No matter which of them wins, neither of them ever pays the cost itself. *We* do all the paying. Neither of them ever considers *our* welfare. Capital profiteers, limits production, arbitrarily controls prices and markets, caring nothing how near we come to hunger and nakedness so long as more can still be squeezed out of us. Labor, if it can advance its own interests, does not hesitate to let the rest of us starve or freeze. Sometimes it seems as if it might be that Capital and Labor, behind their warfare, are secret partners, staging a mimic strife so that a further drain on our savings will seem only a necessary solution of a dangerous problem.

Meanwhile the rest of us sit helplessly and watch the dogs Capital and Labor fight over us, the bone.

Isn't it time to put a stop to that? The real power lies with *us*.

WE ARE the majority. It merely happens that the two other classes are organized and we are not. That is the sole reason that they are able to make us their victim. The remedy is obvious—*we* must organize. It has become a necessity, a plain matter of self-perservation.

The existence of any organized class is a menace to democracy. But two organized classes preying upon an unorganized third class is an infinitely greater menace to democracy. We *must* organize. And, unless we too are to degenerate into hogs instead of democrats, we must take upon ourselves the added duty of seeing to it that our fight is for the rights and comfort of all Americans, not for ourselves alone. That we are far more likely than the two other classes to assume this broader duty is proved by the simple fact that we have gone so long without organizing, that our interests are so much more American than they are those of a class that we have all this time remained only Americans and are driven to class organization only by the pressure of necessity.

And, once organized, *we* hold the control. Neither Capital nor Labor can stand against us. If you doubt it, use your eyes. Look around you. More and more it is evident that, every time any considerable body of ordinary citizens definitely band themselves together even temporarily, Capital and Labor at once are driven to the defensive.

WAKE up! When citizens band together their voice is *public opinion*. And public opinion, argue it how you please, is the fundamental executive force, the fundamental power, in a democracy. Ballot and standing laws are merely tools for its expression; when public opinion itself, public opinion directly expressed, speaks out, then minorities recognize their master's voice. And if that public opinion makes it plain that its words will be backed by acts, in many cases the minorities will not attempt to resist. If they do, the majority have the power to overcome that resistance. We can have our way —if we will.

Who are "we"? Some twelve million farmers, some millions of professional men and women, more millions of clerks, accountants, small retailers—the *middle class*. The majority. The backbone and brains of the country. The *majority*.

POWER? We have it in every way. Except that now we lack organization. The middle class of England has organized and is proving in practise what you may consider the mere theories set forth here. At this writing I have just learned of the organization, in this country, of the Inter-Professional Conference, which is not only what its name implies but also seems to have a vision and purpose much broader than the interests of the sub-class it represents. American farmers are already partially organized, as are other sub-classes of the middle-class. It remains to organize the whole middle-class into a unit acting for its own protection and for the interests of the democracy at large. That organization is inevitable. The point is to bring it

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about in time to save endless trouble and suffering and to ensure the safety and right development of democracy.

DON'T forget this. The middle-class are the chief *consumers.* A middle-class union is a union of *consumers.* Already, as *consumers,* they have attained local organization is some places.

And mark this. Capital and Labor are consumers as well as capital and labor. (Just as we consumers are also capitalists and laborers.) But, as consumers, Capital and Labor are *in the minority,* the real buying-power lies with us. And the fact that they are consumers as well as capital and labor is one of the weak points of Capital and Labor as classes. Against their will their personal interests to a large extent lie with our interests, and to that extent they are in our power, for we hold the control in that field. But the main point is that their allegiance is divided. A large proportion of them, particularly of Labor, realize that what they squeeze out of themselves as laborers or capitalists from some particular faucet of the complex economic machine they must more than pay back as consumers. Of what good are a man's higher wages or profits if he must pay out more for everything he buys?

A great part of those who on the face of things are identified with Labor or Capital realize that their greatest gain in the long run is to be got by aligning themselves with the consumers. Still more of them are sufficiently clear-sighted and sufficiently sincere in their desire for real democracy to ally themselves with the majority if we the majority show that *we* are sufficiently clear-sighted and sincere for democracy to fight for the rights of the people as a whole instead of only for our own class advancement. Capital and Labor were too stupid and selfish to adopt any broader or more intelligent platform than that of a hog. If we, the only remaining class, can do no better then democracy, as well as prosperity, is doomed.

THE hopeful thing is, as previously stated, that it is our broader Americanism that has kept us from class organization until driven to it for self-preservation—we have shown ourselves more inclined than the others to consider the whole people rather than some part of them. One reason for this is that in our ranks are found most of those called "altruists" and "idealists." "Patriots" and "democrats" are other words for the same thing. This last fact is not always recognized merely because most of the middle-class "altruists" and "democrats" are not stump-speakers, soap-box orators, writers, politicians or agitators. But they are there all the same.

WE, THE middle class, must organize. Once organized, we become the determining factor in our country's, and democracy's, future.

And unless we organize, we become merely cows to be milked by Capital and Labor. Capital has already shown that it considers us only cows, and Labor as it comes into power takes the same attitude. (Union Labor in America and Bolshevist Russia are vastly different things, but the latter illustrates what happens when class glorification goes to the extreme: in Russia the Bolshevists openly declared war on the middle-class, the bourgeosie, and set to work at exterminating them both as a class and as individuals. Bolshevist Russia is beginning to realize the stupidity of its mistake, but that doesn't help those of the middle class who were exterminated.)

ABOVE all, let no one think the middle class does not hold the power. Suppose, for example, that we refused to buy certain commodities or to buy the least possible quantity of them. We've already done it locally and Capital has promptly gone on the defensive.

Again, we have in various States risen up and told both coal capitalists and coal laborers that, whatever the differences between them, we the majority refused to be left to freeze—that if they wouldn't produce coal, we would; that, if they wouldn't consider the people's health and life, then the people would take things into their own hands.

Again, suppose *we* adopt Labor's methods and go on strike, refusing to do *our* vast part in production. Let the doctors and dentists allow all but members of our union to suffer and die. Lawyers will serve only our members, leaving the other side of all cases without legal advice. Teachers will give education to no children whose parents belong to Capital or Labor. Farmers will sell food only to our union, leaving the minority to starve. Executives, engineers, inventors, efficiency experts, trained experts of all kinds will leave Capital to suffer for lack of their services, with Labor suffering as a result. Clerks and salesmen will serve only the small retailers of our union, and the small retailers will handle goods from only our small producers.

Oh, yes, we too would suffer, just as Labor suffers when it strikes, but it would give both Capital and Labor the terrible jolt they need to make them realize that no one class can exist without the other two. Also it would dawn on them that, if it came to the real pinch, we the middle class, who are producers, capitalists and Laborers as well as consumers, *could get along without them far better than either or both of them could get along without us.*

Think it over, Capital and Labor. Think it over, Middle Class. A. S. H.

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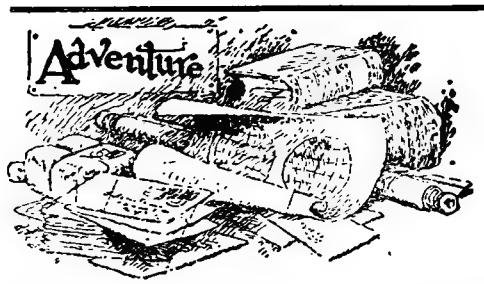

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In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: Mid-June, 1918, to Mid-March, 1919 (inclusive); First June, 1919, to Mid-Nov., 1919 (inclusive). Twenty cents per copy, or $5.00 for the thirty-one copies, not including postage.—Address ANDREW HANDY, Jr., Fair Haven, N. J.

WILL BUY: Complete set from Nov., 1910, up to 1918. State price per lot or issue.—Address N. HORN, 304 West 49th St., New York City.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn in lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it, aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps. Hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, 714 Crilly B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E.E.HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors, or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

20. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

21. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

22. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

23. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

24. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N. M. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

25. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

26. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

27. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

28. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

29. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

31. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

32. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg, Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

FOR ARMY, NAVY OR MARINE CORPS

What the Government is doing for discharged soldiers and sailors. Facts not opinions given. No questions answered involving criticism or bestowing praise or blame. Enclose stamped addressed envelope. Address—SERVICE, THE HOME SECTOR, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, New York.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

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Colombia of Today

THIS most northerly of South American Republics is yearly attracting hundreds of Americans—prospectors, lumbermen, farmers, explorers. It is a land of untold mineral wealth, vast forests, and open country where one can raise anything from tobacco and oranges to apples and wheat.

Question:—"Another marine and I are very interested in Colombia. Will you answer for us these questions about that Republic?

How far from its mouth is the Magdalena River navigable for river boats of the size carrying freight and passengers?

What restrictions are imposed on bringing firearms into the country?

Is a separate set of customs laws encountered upon passing from one state in the Republic to another?

About what is the elevation at the head of navigation?

Can a foreigner acquire title to mineral land in Colombia other than by purchase?

When do the rainy seasons occur?

Can supplies and equipment such as pack saddles be purchased at river ports? What do pack and riding animals average in price in the interior?

Has the Colombian Government any consular agents on the Pacific Coast of the United States?" —JOHN C. CARTER, Marine Detachment, Peking, China.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The principal river of Colombia, the Magdalena, and the fourth largest river in South America (Amazon, Orinoco, and Rio de la Plata) is 1,060 miles long, and during high water is navigable for 830 miles, to a point above Neiva. The second largest river of Colombia, the Cauca, 500 miles in length, joins the Magdalena about 200 miles from its mouth, at Tacaloa, and is not navigable except by canoe, due to the numerous rapids and falls. Other rivers of Colombia: Sinu, rising in the western Cordillera and flowing into the Gulf of Morrosquillo, navigable for small boats for about 100 miles; the Atrato, 350 miles long, rises in western Cordillera and flows into the Gulf of Darien, navigable 230 miles; the San Juan, rising near source of Atrato, but on other side of divide, flows into Pacific about 200 miles away. It and its branches furnish navigable waterways of about 300 miles.

Several tributaries of the Orinoco rise on the eastern slope of the Cordillera Oriental, near the center of the Republic, and flow east, entering the Orinoco at and near where it forms the western boundary of Venezuela; several tributaries of the Rio Negro and other large tributaries of the Amazon rise a little to the south of the same place and flow southeast into Brazil. The principal tributaries of the Orinoco rising in Colombia are the Meta, 500 miles long (with its tributaries Lipa, Cravo, Casanare, Ariporo, Pauto, Tocaria, Cusiana, from the north, and Humadea, Negro, and Manacacia, with their various tributaries, from the south) and the Guaviare which flows into the Orinoco about 200 miles above the mouth of the Meta. Many other tributaries of the Amazon rise in the southern part and flow either into Brazil or Ecuador.

I have never had any trouble in entering rifles and revolvers with their respective ammunition intended for my own use on either coast of Colombia. The last time I was there I carried in over a thousand .38 Spl. cartridges. I don't know what the exact law is but I do know that there is an unwritten law that a prospector or traveler is supposed to go armed and there is no objection made to it. If you have any trouble leave them in hock at the custom-house and get the American consul, or any old-timer from this country, to help you get them through. Declare yourself as a traveler, explorer, mining engineer (I have been a self-styled mining engineer in all the Latin countries) and a man who is trying to bring to light the mineral wealth of the country. Incidentally they have no use for an American in Colombia, due to the Panama trouble, and in a pinch declare yourself a Canadian.

There are no separate customs laws encountered in passing from one department (state) to another. The local officers are liable to haul you up and quiz you though, in small retired settlements, and you must treat them with a great show of politeness and respect for their offices, for they take themselves seriously.

The head of navigation on the various rivers is of various heights. I believe the town of Neiva on the Magdalena is about 3,000 feet above sea level, but I have no way of confirming it. With smaller boats this point may be passed and the trip continued for another hundred miles. The river boats that ply the Magdalena are not unlike the boats that ply our Ohio and Mississippi rivers but are of very shallow draft, and in Summer due to the bars in the river many of them are hauled out on the ways at Barranquilla and Savanilla.

A foreigner can acquire title to mining land in Colombia other than by purchase. The laws are not unlike our own mining laws in this respect, but separate concessions for large mining grants are given and ratified by Congress. You can get a copy of the mining laws of all the Latin-American countries in a book published by the Pan-American Union at Washington, D. C. In any large library you can find them in a book called "Mining Laws of the World." I have forgotten the author's name.

Climate. It depends upon what part of Colombia and what coast, as regards climate. The Caribbean coast is hotter than the Pacific, with temperatures on both coasts ranging from 75 to 90 degrees. Going up the slope into the higher valleys to an elevation of from 3,000 to 6,000 a temperate zone is found, with temperature ranging from 65 to 75 degrees F. Above this is the *tierra fria*, cold land, from 6,000 to 10,000, with temperature of from 50 to 65.

There are many mountain peaks in Colombia with elevations ranging from 13,000 to 15,000 feet, and several of over 17,000. The higher peaks are covered with perpetual snow.

Along the coasts the rainfall is excessive, the rainy season lasting for six months, and the precipitation amounting, in places, to 140 inches. In the high table-lands there are two rainy and two dry seasons, with the precipitation for both rainy seasons amounting to 40 inches per annum.

At some part or other of Colombia a suitable climate and soil may be found to produce anything that grows at any place in the entire world. In

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spite of this the people are the poorest, the laziest and have about the poorest government in all Latin America. Their peso (paper dollar) is worth one cent, American gold. In the lowlands they have mixed strongly with negroes and it is hard to find a family that does not have some old black granny or kinky-headed children hidden away in the patio to be brought out when they know the visitor better. They are up to their eyes in filth in all the coast towns and cities. They are up to their eyes in it in the highlands also, but the nostrils cannot detect it so strongly as in the coast towns. I have seen mules lying dead in the streets of Cartagena with the buzzards eating them, and no one cared. In the early morning one must be careful in places to keep from getting run over by some *paterfamilias* dashing out with a beer keg full of human excrement to dump in the streets. But you get used to that and you love and pity the whole dirty mess of them.

The peons of all Latin-America are as lovable as good-natured shepherd dogs. They are not to blame, poor devils. It's their good nature and extreme laziness that makes them the prey of cunning, scheming, money-hungry politicians. The peon is a prince. He will take the bread out of his mouth and give it to you if you are hungry. And if you are hungry enough, as I have been at times, you will enjoy it.

I would say that you could buy a fairly good saddle pony for forty dollars, American gold, or much less if you look around. Burros are worth from two dollars up to about five. Mules are considered a better saddle animal and a good single-footing mule is worth real money. I would say you could get a good mule for from sixty to eighty dollars, American money. Don't forget the fact that a man can walk a mule to death. I find it much easier to walk for a couple of months than to ride for a couple of months, and not half so much trouble and expense. Put your packs on good strong mules, and then hike it.

Supplies and equipment can be bought in many of the large towns and cities. Pack-saddles, ropes, rawhides, etc., are plentiful, also there are many Americans in the mining country up around Medellin.

The Colombian Government maintains offices in many of our large cities, including San Francisco. You will be able to find the addresses of these in the World Almanac, which I have no doubt you will be able to find.

Colombia is very rich in minerals. Gold is found in almost every department (state) of the country. Also Colombia produces iron, platinum, lead, cinnabar, manganese, silver, copper, quicksilver, coal, salt, marble, sulphur, alum, petroleum and asphaltum. Diamonds are discovered frequently. The famous emerald mines of Muzo produce annually about $100,000 worth of gems.

The lines are, and always have been, in dispute between Colombia and her neighbors, especially in the southern part where the country is practically unexplored, so that an exact area is not possible. The area is estimated at from 460,000 to 525,000 square miles and the population estimated at about 4,000,000, including various tribes of savage and uncivilized Indians to the number of about 250,000.

Game is plentiful, consisting of the following: Puma, jaguar, deer, monkeys, sloth, armadillos, opossum, guagua, tapir, cavy, many birds, alligators, sharks, many and various fish, and a great number of poisonous and non-poisonous snakes below an altitude of 5,000 feet.

Bogota, the capital, has a population of nearly 150,000, Barranquilla has 40,000, Medellin 50,000, Cartagena 20,000, Bucuramanga 25,000, and many others ranging down the list. Bogota is 8,630 feet above sea level.

The Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., distribute a free booklet dealing with Colombia and other pamphlets. The Department of Commerce, Latin-American Division, is also useful for free information regarding this country. The *Pan-American Bulletin*, an excellent magazine, not unlike the *National Geographic*, is published by the Pan-American Union at Washington. If you get back into this country before going to Colombia I would suggest that you get in touch with all of them.

African Ivory and Steel

THERE are few of us who have not longed, at one time or another, to go big-game hunting. It is the sport of sports. In Mr. Miller's answer to this letter you learn how one becomes an elephant hunter:

Question:—"I would like the following information about West Africa:

1. Are there many whites there?
2. Are Africa and India the only places where elephants are found?
3. Are elephants the only ivory-bearing animals?
4. What steps should one take to learn to be an elephant hunter?
5. How do African natives make steel for their weapons?"—H. H. Smith, Smoky Butte, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—At administration headquarters, custom ports, etc., to West Africa there are generally from four to a dozen whites; then here and there, widely scattered, are whites in twos or threes, in charge of trading stations, acting as commissioners over natives, etc., but mostly the whites live lonesome lives. There are several native regiments officered by whites and there is the native constabulary. Try and imagine West Africa as something like America in the early days of the Indians and settlers.

Elephants are common only to small areas of Africa, East and West, and, unlike the Indian elephant, the African species is untamable, useful only for its ivory. The elephant is also common to Siam, Ceylon and Southern Asia, generally.

Elephants are about the only animals worth hunting for ivory. The teeth of the rhinoceros, hippopotamus, etc. make marketable ivory.

It takes many years of bush experience, much money, vigorous health and long practise with the rifle to take up elephant hunting, and at that few make any money at it. You would have to start with smaller game, then some way find your way to Africa, in some working capacity, take a lot of hard knocks and watch your chance to join an expedition into the interior, which is a slim chance, and thus gradually pick up the many angles of elephant hunting.

In parts of West Africa I have seen the blacks with primitive clay furnaces melting iron and working it up into knives with stone anvils and forges

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blown by human bellows. But the trader has introduced knives to most parts of Africa. There was a great demand in Nigeria, when I was there, for the hoop staves that came off the barrels, binding steel bands from packing-cases, which the natives worked up into razors, and even the empty tin cans were valued by the blacks for their metal.

Salmon-Fishing on Puget Sound

THOUSANDS of men, with power boats, take a living, and a good one, from the waters of Washington State. This short survey gives you an idea of the possibilities in salmon fishing. If you long to work in the outdoors, here's a chance that is worth looking into:

Question: "What are the possibilities of making a living on Puget Sound by salmon fishing with a power boat? This I suppose could be combined with other motor boat work.

I have had no experience fishing, and know little about boating. How could I learn these?

I have in mind either an auxiliary yawl, a sailing dory, a second-hand sailing cruiser-yacht, or a power boat."—E. S. ELLISON, Los Banos, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—During the season of the salmon run, which is on in August, but nearly over, there are some 3,000 motor boats of various sizes operating in this customs district, the majority of them engaged in trolling. A good second-hand motor-boat, fit to go into the Strait of Fuca, can be had for somewhere around $1,500 to $1,800; or new for about double that figure. I have known however, of an occasional bargain in such boats at even a lower figure.

In a good season boats have averaged better than $1,500 to the hand. Ninety per cent. of all the men engaged in the fisheries here started with no more knowledge of the business than you have.

Really, the best thing to do is to get on the ground and in touch with the men engaged in the fisheries, and you will find no serious difficulty in catching on and, if you are of the right kind of material, in making good.

Bass, Pickerel and Carp

THE season is nearly at hand. Proof: Haven't you already scraped and revarnished that pet split-bamboo casting-rod? And fixed the reel with the broken click? And spent an evening in a big catalog which told of flies and plugs and leaders?

Question:—"I find you are an authority on fishing and tackle. Will you please give me the following information?

1. Pickerel: What is best bait to use—live, home-made, or manufactured artificial?
2. Black bass: Same question as above.
3. What is food of pickerel, black bass, carp?
4. What are the favortie haunts of pickerel, black bass and carp? By this I mean deep or shallow water, clear or muddy ponds, lily pads, weedy bottoms.
5. Carp: I am told these fish are "foxy" and that, while one may be caught, you can't expect a big haul unless you first accustom them to feeding in a certain place on a certain kind of food. What is your opinion?
6. Are carp good to eat and how should they be prepared?—M. C. DE LOISELLE, Southampton, L. I., N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—1. Best kind of bait for pickerel is live minnows, especially shiners. The artificial baits are the wooden plugs such as the Bass-Oreno, and all the different spinning baits.

2. Best line baits for black bass are live minnows, crawfish, hellgrammites and worms. The artificial baits are the spinning lures, flies, wooden plugs.
3. The pickerel feeds on minnows, snails, crawfish, flies, and young, tender crustaceans. The same can be said of the bass. The carp is a bottom feeder and feeds on roots of aquatic plants and every kind of animal matter he can take into his sucker mouth.
4. Pickerel like to lie along moss banks and among lily pads, preferring shallow water in lakes and rivers. They are usually clear-water fish like the bass, though, like them, often are found in muddy waters. But the latter is rather the exception than the rule.

   Bass change their habits very often, and feed close to shore, along gravel beds, among lily pads and water grasses, especially the big-mouths. The small-mouth likes swift water in streams and haunts the rocks and sunken logs, both in shallow and deep water. But they favor clear water, and sometimes strike best artificial lures along rocky bluffs where the water is clear and deep. But one day they will strike from deep water and on the following they will be in the shoals, and they are not reliable in their habits, especially as they will be in abundance one place a certain day, and the next they can not be seen there.
5. Carp are bottom feeders; they prefer muddy streams and lakes. They are easily caught with the dough-ball bait, which consists of equal parts of corn-meal and flour, mixed with water enough to roll in little dough-balls and dropped into hot water until cooked tough. They suck in the bait, so the bait must rest on the bottom of the stream. They move about and feed, but like all bottom feeders can be made to frequent a place by baiting it with meal. They bite on worms, crawfish-tails, and sometimes dead minnows.
6. In many of the large streams of the West carp are regarded as a pest, but are used by the poor in the large cities for food. They grow to immense size in the Mississippi and its tributaries. The small ones are fried and the larger baked. Some like them. The flesh is fair but very bony.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

KYLE, WESLEY or GORDON. Please send address. An old friend.—Address L. T., No. 383, care of *Adventure.*

McLEAN, GEO. or JAS. Please send address. An old friend.—Address L. T., No. 383, care of *Adventure.*

HENDERSON, JOHN. Please send address. An old friend.—Address L. T., No. 383, care of *Adventure.*

BERRIGAN, EDWARD or "CHUB." Please send address. An old friend.—Address L. T., No. 383, care of *Adventure.*

RAMEY, DEWEY. Of Newark, Ohio. Remember the home, Dewey, and the B. I. S.—Address JAMES MORRIS, 8th Co., Balboa, Fort Amador, C. Z., C. A. C.

KILGORE, Y. J., DICK. Last heard of in Atlanta in 1918. Was on way to Washington, D. C. Any information as to present address will be appreciated.—Address OLD FLORIDA FRIEND, care of *Adventure.*

CLARK, CHARLEY, *alias* JAMES KELLY. Address in 1912 was General Delivery, Chicago, Ill. Any inforamtion regarding his whereabouts will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. ROSA FIFIELD, care of *Adventure.*

PARKER, JOHN R. Ran away from home when fourteen years of age. Has light hair, blue eyes and fair skin. Any one knowing his whereabouts kindly write.—Address DR. M. PARKER, 403 Mint St., Rochester, N. Y.

McGUIRE, AMOS or WILLIS. Age fourteen and sixteen years. Last heard of in Belarie, Mich., in 1916. Any information will be appreciated by brother.—Address JOSEPH W. McGUIRE, care of General Delivery, Camp Humphreys, Va.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

RICHARDSON, FRANK EPLY. Of 39th Infantry, Headquarters Co. Killed in the war. If any ex-soldier knows anything about this man, I would like to hear from him.—Address LOUIS SHEPPARD, Robal Inn, San Pedro, Cal.

FALUSI, JOSEPH. Of Field Co. A, Signal Corps, U. S. Army. Brother. Last heard from when discharged from service, February, 1918. I am in Detroit now and would like to see you. Important. Any one knowing of his whereabouts, please write.—Address STEVEN M. FALUSI, 71 Brainard St., Detroit, Mich.

ORMAN. Any relatives of Madeline Orman, born in New York City, Nov 25, 1886. Adopted when three years old from an orphans' home by Mr. and Mrs. Dominick Barrett, of New Richmond, Wis. I am not sure I was born in New York, but that is what I have been told by those who adopted me. I shall be grateful for any information whatever.—Address MRS. OTTO EVERETT, New Richmond, Wis.

MORSE, RAYMOND. Please send address. An old friend.—Address, L. T., No. 383, care of *Adventure.*

CAMPBELL, DUNCAN. Father. Tall, slender, dark hair, age about fifty-two. Last heard of at East Carnegie, Pa., about twenty-two years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T., 384, care of *Adventure.*

FARREN, HARRY F. Please send address. An old friend.—Address, L. T., No. 383, care of *Adventure.*

NULPH, STEWART. Last heard of in Great Falls, Mont. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T., No. 386, care of *Adventure.*

DAVIS, JACK. Last heard of in Great Falls, Mont. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T., No. 386, care of *Adventure.*

WOLVERTON, EARL L. Last heard of January 3, 1919, in Mexico, Missouri. Please write your brother at once.—Address GUERNEY L. WOLVERTON, Army Supply Base, M Co., 12th Infantry, Norfolk, Va.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

D. I. K. I have not heard from you in over a year. "Nix on the beans." I am not in Imperial Valley now. I've lost the best friend I ever had. Write to me, Dan. No. 4 in the light No. 3.—Address "FAT," care of *Adventure.*

DENNING, LESLIE G. Write to your old pal. Have news from Chelsea Barracks for you. If you are in "Aussie" let me know where.—Address HARRY MONCREIFFE, 307 Carrall St., Vancouver, B. C.

DAVIS, FREDDY. Fifteen years of age, tall, dark brown hair and brown eyes. Last heard of in Houston, Tex., in 1917. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreciated by his father.—Address WM. DAVIS, R. F. D. No. 4, Wausa, Nebr.

KRUGER, HENRY. Acrobat and wrestler. Was swimming instructor at Cascade Plunge, Dallas, Texas. Write old friend of proposed wanderlust tour.—Address PVT. THOMAS W. SLATER, B Co., 15th U. S. Infantry, Tientsin, North China.

LA PIERRE, JAMES. Last heard of in Juneau, Alaska, in 1896. Born in Halifax City, age forty-seven, height five feet five inches, weight about 180 pounds, scar on side of left nostril. Any information will be appreciated.—Address A. J. LA PIERRE, 143½ Chebucto Rd., Halifax, N. S.

LAMIE, JAMES. Native of Sandy Row, Belfast, Ireland. Left Belfast April 7, 1910, for Toronto, Canada. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated. —Address DAVID LIGGETT, care of Mrs. Mary MacInnis, 7A High St., Miller's Point, Sydney City, Australia.

ADAMS, NEWBURN. Of Augusta, Ga. Formerly of E Co., 6th U. S. Infantry. Please communicate with JAMES MORRIS, 8th Co., Balboa, Fort Amador, C. Z., C. A. C.

WAGNER, GUS. Last heard of in Kansas City. Was with me in southern California. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address "UNGUNA," care of *Adventure.*

DEAN, CLARENCE. Last heard of with 34th Labor Regiment, Camp Joseph E. Johnston, Jackson, Fla. Later was in a remount regiment, and then went overseas. About five feet eight inches tall, brown hair. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY GILLESPIE, Route 3, Palestine, Tex.

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CHAPMAN, CHAS. Of Paynesville, Ohio. One time in C Co., 35th Infantry. Will learn something to his advantage by writing me.—Address L. T., No. 385, care of *Adventure*.

COHEN, JACOB. Father. Was a resident of Montreal about five years ago. Left for Australia shortly after. A tailor by trade, forty-eight years of age, dark hair, five feet ten inches tall, heavily built. Any information will be appreciated.—Address S. M. COHEN, care of S. Rosenthal, 35 Orchard St., New York, N. Y.

VAIL, JOHN M. Father. Separated from wife in 1894. He is about sixty years of age, six feet tall and weighs about 200 pounds. Left hand off at wrist, blue eyes. He was a boomer telegraph operator. A native of Pennsylvania. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FRANK J. VAIL, 320 N. Hall St., Algona, Iowa.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CHANDLER, FRANK CHARLEY. Brother. Home was in Emporium, Pa. Left home ten years ago. Last heard of in New York State near Cuba or Black Creek. Was twenty-five years of age September 14th, dark hair, blue-gray eyes, center of one hand badly scarred by bullet explosion, large mole on right hip. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. L. A. CHANDLER, R. F. D. No. 1, Emporium, Pa., or HAZEL CHANDLER VAN VOORHIS, 333 Portage St., Emporium, Pa.

DENNING, W. CHARLES. Son. Missing since July 22nd last. Big, husky boy, regular features, brown hair, blue eyes, about five feet five inches tall, age fourteen years. Supposed to be going on the boats. Charley, it will be quite all right if you tell me where you are and I know you are well. Then I shall be able to know where I am to be when you decide to come back to mother.—Address MRS. ETHEL DENNING, 16 Metcalfe St., Toronto, Canada.

WILL the person from Mare Island, Cal., who wrote the article published in the Mid-October issue of *Adventure*, stating that he would like *Adventure* to devise some method by which its readers could become acquainted, kindly write to me, as I have some information. I had an old pal who was in Mare Island, Cal., the last I heard of him, and you may be he. If not, write anyway.—Address EUGENE WATTS, 220 W. Kennedy St., Syracuse, N. Y.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-January or First February issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ALBERT, VIVIAN; Ayton, Tom; Baker, M. Lena; Ball, Charles Frederick; Barber, Miss Pearl; Brooke, James Henry; Dixon, Robert L.; Dorks, Miss Barbara; Fiedler, Edward or "Bany"; Hall, Leslie A.; Hart, Harry Lee; Hartwig, George H.; Hugh; Innes, Richard and James; J. A. B. or B. R. T.; Keaser, Jacob; Kemp, John Crawley; Leeman, George W.; Louden, Hall; Mattos or Murray, Frank J.; McClarty, James; Moss, Corp. Bruce D.; Pentacoff, Sgt. Charles W.; Phillips, Warren J.; Pollard, Charles; Prescott, George; Reeser, Albert E.; Robinson, Ian; Sagle, Ollie E.; Smith, Charles E.; Smith, Paul J.; Smith, William; Streetzel, Fred; Thom, Gustave; Wallace, Roland Martin; Williams, "Montana" or Walter; Baker, Walker, G.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jennie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieut. Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Atkins; James P. Goggins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; H. E. Copp.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALLISON, CORP. JAMES T.; Beaton, G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bryson, Clarence F.; Mr. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; Carr, Fred; Coles, Bobby; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Engleby, B.; Garson, Ed.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Hines, Joseph; Kelly, Charles Lester; Koltzau, John; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Dr. William R.; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva L.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Parott, D. C.; Raymond, C. E.; Rich, Bob; Rundle, Merrill G.; Scott, James F.; Swan, George F.; Taylor, Jim; Thomas, C. L.; Tripp, Edward; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Wetherell, Corp. D. E.; Williams, Raymond J. ;Williams, W. P.; Wood, Basil D.; S 177284; 439; L. T. 348; J. C. H.; W. S.-X. V.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD
FIRST MARCH ISSUE

Eleven adventures are to be found along the trail ahead. Here are nine of them; the other two, both complete novelettes, are described on page two.

ROSE FACE — *By H. A. Lamb*
It is written that the clashing of bright swords delights the soul of a brave man, yet in this year—early in the seventeenth century—*Jani Beg* puts aside his sword and takes up another, more deadly weapon.

THE GATE THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN Part III — *By Hugh Pendexter*
Followed by a few faithful Arapahoes, "*Uncle Dick*" *Wooton* sets out after "*Gentleman Ralph*," the bandit chief who has become the terror of the Southwest.

THE PECCARIES — *By Arthur O. Friel*
"*King of the Peccaries*," he calls himself, the cruel monster whose bandits, painted to resemble jungle-pigs, are the curse of the Brazilian rubber-gatherers. And in the fulness of time he has the chance to prove his title.

SHEPHERDS FOR SCIENCE — *By W. C. Tuttle*
Are sheep-herders all crazy to start with or do they just get that way? *Ike Harper* and "*Dirty Shirt*" *Jones* are entrusted with the commission of finding out.

THE MERCHANT AND THE M. P.'S OF TOXERRE — *By Thomas McMorrow*
When "*The Merchant*" decides to be A.W.O.L. and take a trip to Paris, he does not realize that he and his dog are to have the honor of sleeping beside a provost marshal.

THE SECOND FALL — *By S. B. H. Hurst*
A group of Hindu priests working in all parts of the world bring about the second fall of man. The means they employ is hypnotism and, of the entire population of the globe, only two survive. An "Off the Trail" story.

THE MAN-MAKER — *By Edgar Young*
He is a hard taskmaster, the taciturn gringo who buys this young peon for a handful of Mexican dollars, and the slave holds him in hatred; but when the test comes, there in the mountains of Mexico, "the Greaser" surprizes himself by his own action.

AT THE TURN — *By Roy P. Churchill*
Father and son, the *Falcons* of each generation start life by going to the dogs, and end by going to the top. It is a bucko mate and a mishap on the high seas that give *Jim Falcon* the chance to rehabilitate himself.

THE WEIGHT OF REPUTATION — *By Harrison R. Howard*
"He's a quitter," says *Florence White* at first. "He's a go-getter," says the tough Black Creek district later on. Forest ranger *Elmer Randolph* earns both reputations, and *Florence White* apologizes.

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